



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07576135 7

IF WISHES WERE HORSES

• THE COUNTESS BARCZYŃSKA •



1. Fiction, English

ROM

2'

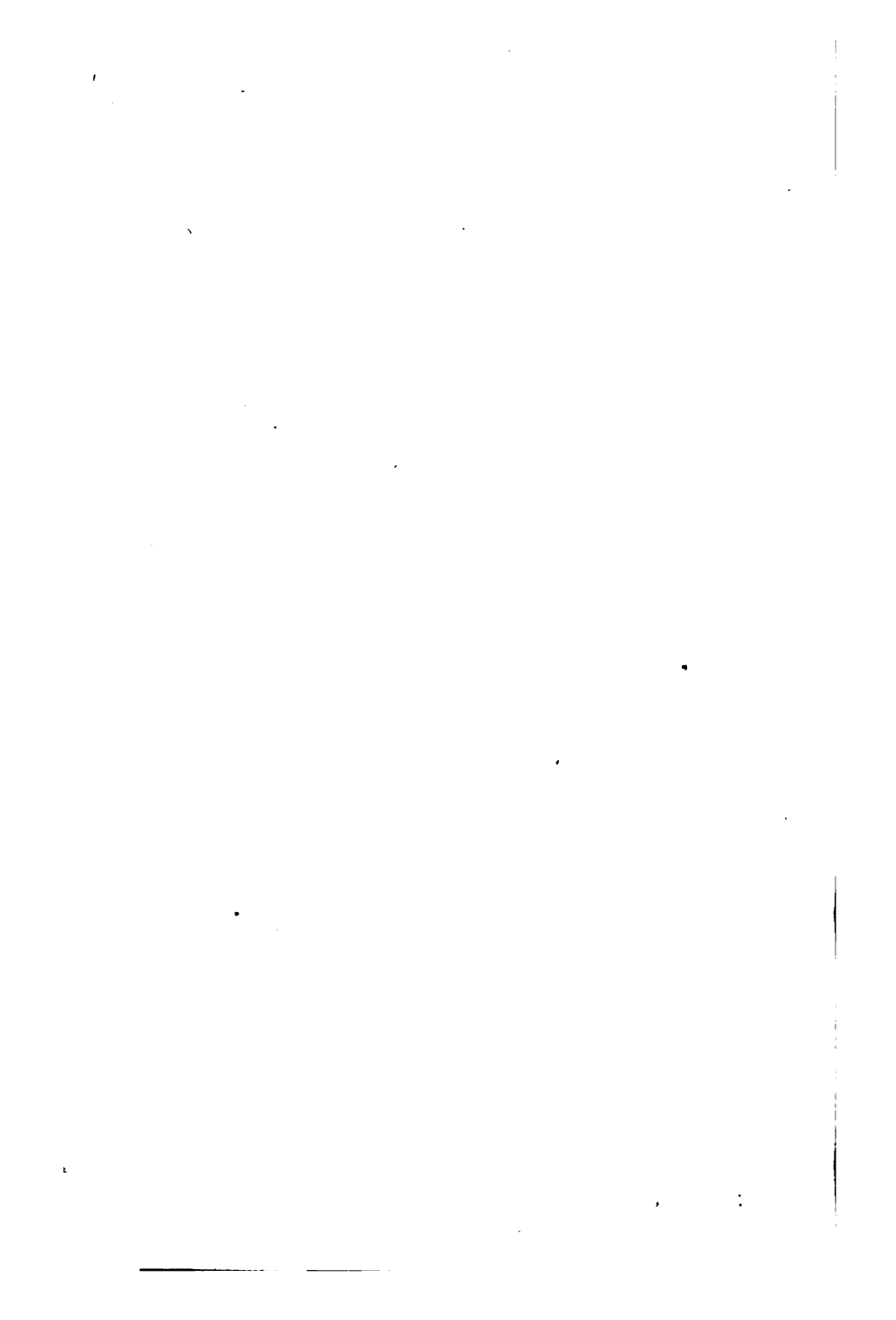
NCW
Evans

1. Fiction, English

ROM

21

NCW
Evans



IF WISHES WERE HORSES

3.1/35
J

IF WISHES WERE HORSES

BY
THE COUNTESS BARCYNKA
AUTHOR OF "THE LITTLE MOTHER WHO SITS AT HOME,"
"THE HONEY-POT," ETC.

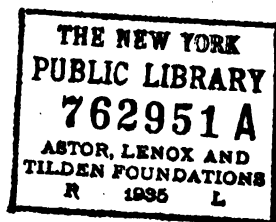


o

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & CO.
681 FIFTH AVENUE

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

E 1
11



COPYRIGHT, 1917,
By E. P. DUTTON & CO

FROM THE
OLIVER
P. DUTTON

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

BOOK I

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. THE FRUIT OF THE TREE | 9 |
| II. "VERY QUIETLY, OWING TO A DEATH IN THE BRIDE'S FAMILY" | 16 |
| III. "ROSALIA" | 26 |
| IV. MARTIN GETS HIS MONEY'S WORTH | 29 |
| V. ROUTH VILLAS | 40 |
| VI. MARTIN GETS A SHOCK AND IS SENT ON A SHAMEFUL ERRAND | 45 |
| VII. AUNT POLLY'S SERMON | 54 |
| VIII. A FIRST STEP TO GENTILITY | 61 |
| IX. MARTIN ENTERS THE POLITICAL ARENA | 70 |
| X. AUNT POLLY TAKES OFFENSE | 77 |
| XI. REPORTED IN FULL | 82 |
| XII. MARTIN GETS A LESSON IN VALUES | 86 |
| XIII. AND ANOTHER LESSON IN POLICY | 91 |
| XIV. AND ASSIMILATES WHAT HE LEARNS FROM BOTH | 98 |
| XV. BOTH FEET ON THE LADDER | 105 |
| XVI. ROSE ASKS A QUESTION | 117 |
| XVII. HONEYMOON DAYS | 123 |
| XVIII. A FAIRY TALE COME TRUE | 129 |
| XIX. MARTIN LEFTLEY, M.P. | 136 |

BOOK II

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| XX. THE TWINS | 145 |
| XXI. LADY LEFTLEY | 154 |
| XXII. IN THE DARK | 160 |
| XXIII. EDGAR | 170 |
| XXIV. PLAIN MARY PEACOCK | 179 |

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XXV. HARRIS | 185 |
| XXVI. DOMESTIC ECONOMY | 191 |
| XXVII. DOROTHY BECOMES AN ASSET | 201 |
| XXVIII. "DUDS" | 212 |
| XXIX. EDGAR GOES ON STRIKE | 220 |
| XXX. MARTIN'S HARVESTING | 224 |
| XXXI. MARTIN PAYS HIS TITHE | 232 |
| XXXII. TEA ON THE TERRACE | 238 |
| XXXIII. THE PRICE OF A COMMISSION | 243 |
| XXXIV. THE COMMERCIAL VALUE OF A PRETTY WOMAN | 253 |
| XXXV. ROSE CONSULTS A SPECIALIST | 262 |
| XXXVI. DOROTHY LOSES A GLOVE | 269 |
| XXXVII. AN ILLUSTRATION IN CLASS DISTINCTIONS | 277 |
| XXXVIII. NOBLESSE OBLIGE | 282 |
| XXXIX. AUNT POLLY GOES HOME | 287 |
| XL. PURELY COMMERCIAL | 293 |
| XLI. "SPREAD WINGS" | 297 |
| XLII. THE WOMAN PAYS | 304 |
| XLIII. EVENSONG | 309 |

IF WISHES WERE HORSES

BOOK I



IF WISHES WERE HORSES

I

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE

WHEN the office clock informed Martin that it was three minutes past five he methodically collected the papers that littered his desk, stowed them within it, closed the lid and locked it. He also shut the inkpots and arranged pens and pencils in parallel order in their tray. Then he carried half a dozen account books to the safe and locked that.

The day's work was finished. Five o'clock was the canonical hour for leaving the office, but on principle Martin always gave the clock three minutes' grace. He felt it placed him at an advantage with the firm. It was his habit to make such tactical concessions. He was of the foreseeing kind that will forego a small opportunity with a view to future profit. A species of "hedging," this; but the term was unknown to Martin. He hated the turf and all other forms of gambling with the cautious hatred of one who does not take risks.

He passed out of the small dark office into the flagged yard, wet with the constant stream of water that supplied the aerating machines in the adjoining shed. This was already closed and the operators gone. Unlike Martin, they never conceded a single minute of labor to capital. Their Union did not approve of that sort of

thing. Neither did Martin for that matter, but having brains of his own his conduct was not guided by the hard and fast rules of any Trade Union. Rules were devised by the intelligent classes for the proper control of the rank and file, for the benefit, that is, of those who made them. Martin felt quite competent to frame rules for other people. Perhaps one day he would.

Just now he was not thinking of these things. He was congratulating himself that by the time he got home his landlady's funeral would be well over. Sentiment was rather out of Martin's line. Tact would have enjoined solemnity in him at any grave-side; but privately he regarded funerals and such-like conventions as fussy nuisances and waste of time. It was not that he had any dislike of the late Mrs. Metcalf. On the contrary, he had every reason for regretting her death. She had been a worthy soul. He had had proof of it for the last two years. She had never overcharged him nor neglected his comfort. Her merits as a cook had been considerable, a rare capacity amongst landladies, of whom Martin had previously had one or two sad experiences. For one of his class he had fastidious tastes in food.

Indeed, Mrs. Metcalf's demise would probably make a considerable difference to his life. He frowned at the thought. He had not had time to dwell on it before. She had given him great consideration: perhaps he had exacted it. Anyway, he was quite aware that the interest of her household had centered round himself. The two women of which it consisted had waited on him hand and foot, Mrs. Metcalf in the kitchen, priding herself on cooking his meals to a turn, and Rose, her daughter, who served them, made his bed, folded his clothes, and blacked his boots.

Pending the funeral he had considerably gone for his midday dinner and also his tea to Mrs. Peacock's. She was his aunt, and lived close by. To-day, he intended going back to the normal state of things. Aunt Polly, the ignoble trade which she carried on, and her bibulous husband, jarred on his susceptibilities. Aunt Polly had no pretensions. She was slovenly in appearance and never quite dressed. In addition she had an unpleasant habit of speaking her mind, very often at the top of her voice.

On his way home Martin had to pass her shop, whose window shamed the street with an agglomeration of disreputable articles—dilapidated furniture, odd lots of china, old spoons and forks, sad-looking engravings—the flotsam and jetsam that come into the hands of the general dealer. Through the doorway one saw vistas of discolored clothing, male and female; and stacks of old boots and shoes stood on shelves and lay about in the corners. As though this exhibition were not enough to make Aunt Polly's shocking occupation patent to a censorious world it was emphasized in staring lettering over the shop window. That signboard caused Martin a lot of secret shame.

MARY PEACOCK

DEALER IN SECOND-HAND GOODS

Cast-off Clothing, Uniforms, Jewelry, False Teeth,
Books, Pictures, etc., bought for CASH.

He was hoping to slip by the shop unnoticed, but a violent drubbing at the window pane compelled him to

turn his head. He responded to it with a furtive wave of the hand and would have passed on had not Mrs. Peacock's voice brought him to a halt.

"Martin! Martin Leffley!" she shouted. "Ain't you comin' in to tea?"

It made his flesh creep to hear his name proclaimed like that. It put him on a level with the dogs in the street. He regarded names as private property, not public advertisements. There was no false shame about Mrs. Peacock. She thought nothing of sustaining a conversation from a distance of ten yards. She began one now. Martin's only means of bringing it to a stop was to retrace his steps. He walked into the shop, flustered and frowning. He hated that shop. Its disreputable contents offended his eyes; the musty odor of it was an affront to his nostrils.

Mrs. Peacock, an elderly little woman with dirty hands and sharp black eyes, was sorting a nondescript litter of clothes. Patting a second similar pile, she said invitingly:

"Sit down here and I'll bring you a cup of tea. There's no room in the kitchen. Peacock's on the table sleepin' it off. I sold the sofa because a party took a fancy to it yesterday, and he ain't in no state to man-age with a chair. That man's a pig."

Martin thought so too. Peacock was his aunt's second husband. Rumor had it that she had married him suddenly and stealthily while he was under the influence of drink.

"Well, you knew what he was like beforehand," said Martin, disdaining the pile of overcoats.

"I had to marry him," asseverated Mrs. Peacock. "When a man next door but one to you is in the same

trade as yourself and getting more of it than yourself, the only thing left is to marry him, same as the boa-constrictor at the Zoo who swallowed the other one. I've got more than I can manage now. That's what I wanted to speak to you about. I'll just get that cup of tea——"

"I'm a little late, Aunt Polly. I can't stop to tea. Miss Metcalf expects me."

"Well, in a manner of speaking, what I've got to say concerns that girl too. Have you made any arrangements yet?"

"What sort of arrangements?" Martin asked guardedly.

"To find fresh lodgings. Lodgings for a single young man, of course. You can't think of stopping on there alone with a pretty girl."

"Why not?" he stared. "I daresay she can make me quite as comfortable as her mother did. I hope so, at any rate."

Mrs. Peacock snorted. She hadn't much patience with her nephew. Knowing him to be clever she mistrusted him when he showed denseness.

"It's not what she can do. It's what she can't do," she said decidedly. "You mayn't have the feelings of a young man—you're too full of your mineral waters for that—but you wear trousers and you shave, and people don't look beyond that. You can't stop where you are with a person of the opposite sex to what you are."

Martin looked disturbed. He had never thought of Rose Metcalf in that light before. He accepted the statement that she was pretty. He supposed she must be, because he liked looking at her. All the same, his views

about her had been quite detached. Until now, that is. What his aunt had just said was tantamount to giving him a bite of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

"That's woke you up a bit," Mrs. Peacock observed. "Well now, what I've got to propose is this. You can come and live with us if you like. There's the little back room empty, except for the uniforms, so you might as well have it, and nothing charged so long as you help me a bit with the sorting at nights. You could take all the gent's clothes off my hands. When will you come?"

Martin was quick to see that, monetarily, the offer was not without its inducements, quicker still to calculate that its disadvantages outweighed the slight saving to his pocket. Mrs. Peacock was an execrable cook. There were also times when, Peacock becoming too much for her, she was addicted to drowning her own troubles in strong waters. Domesticity, moreover, was not her forte, and not a single clock in the place was in going order. Remembering all these things, he hung back.

"It wouldn't do, Aunt Polly," he said firmly. "You'd find me too much trouble. Meals punctual, and all that. And I shouldn't have time to help you with the clothes, because I've reading to do at night. Thank you all the same though."

Mrs. Peacock sniffed.

"I see what it is, young Martin. We're not smart enough for you. You'd like the shop turned into a front room, and Peacock to get himself up in dress clothes, pretendin' to be a footman, and your poor Aunt Polly to keep her dress buttoned."

Martin made a gesture of repudiation.

"Oh, go along with you," she scoffed. "You can't

help yourself. You're born to try and get above yourself. You're even ashamed of me bein' in the second-hand trade. Look at this coat here f'r instance. You want another one bad. What's the matter with it? It come out of a good house. I fetched it myself. It's the best Melton cloth. Five pounds didn't buy it when it was new, and I'd sell it to you for twelve-and-six. But you—you'd rather wear a bit of new shoddy and pay a pound for it!" She stroked the soft nap of the cloth with a caressing hand. "And worn by a real gentleman! You don't understand that, Martin, my lad. You won't never make yourself any better than shoddy, however hard you try."

She gave him an impatient little push towards the shop door and shut it upon him. But when he was half-way down the street she opened it again and put her head out.

"Mar—tin!" she shrilled. "Don't forget! You can't stop along with a girl alone!"

Then the door slammed.

Martin's ears lit the street.

II

“VERY QUIETLY, OWING TO A DEATH IN THE BRIDE’S
FAMILY”

IT was a wonder that Martin had not fallen in love with Rose Metcalf long ago. Any other young man in his position would have done so, or at least, have paid her attentions. Rose was not unlike a Christmas color-plate come to life. Her hair was bright brown with a wave in it, her complexion unusually pink and white. She had blue eyes of such soft expression that one had only to touch her sympathy to see them instantly fill with rapture or tears. Her one fault was that she had no vices. For all that, she was quite human, so human that she loved Martin. This was her secret, and no one had guessed it, least of all the object of her devotion.

She idealized him. She thought him a being of a superior order. She never expected him to take any notice of her. It was an exquisite pleasure to make his bed, turn out his room, fold up his things, keep his drawers tidy. It would have been infinitely good for Martin if instead of anticipating his every want she had occasionally smacked his face. She would as soon have thought of smacking a policeman or a week-old baby. Still, she was no fool. She had realized some days since that Martin could not continue to live in the house alone with her without causing gossip; but being a woman and reckless where she loved, she had made up

her mind to ignore gossip and keep Martin if she could.

Such is the power of love, moreover, that within three hours of her mother's funeral, obsessed by the desire to satisfy his creature comforts, she had made a steak-and-kidney pie for his high tea, and some jam tartlets into the bargain.

When Martin came in, considerably ruffled and perturbed and still a little red about the ears, which was where he always blushed, he found the table in the parlor ready laid, a good fire in the grate, and his carpet slippers put out to warm. Five minutes later Rose came in with the pie. The rims of her blue eyes were slightly red from recent weeping. She could not hide that evidence of grief, but she did control the quiver of her lips. It was a stoical concession to her feelings for Martin.

Sitting in the armchair watching her he felt a distinct annoyance at the prospect of having to forego all this—warmed slippers, savory pies and all the rest of it—just because she was a girl, young and alone. It almost took his appetite away.

"Good evening," he said solemnly. "I'm glad to be back. Is it—too soon?"

Rose put the pie on the table.

"Oh, no," she said. "I—I like to have you to do for." She placed a chair for him. "Your tea's quite ready."

He looked at the pie and then at the table laid for one. There was enough pie for two, even if he took a second helping.

"Won't you lay a place for yourself?" he asked awkwardly.

Rose had had no tea. There was no reason why she

should not sit down with him. She had no mother now to keep her company in the kitchen.

"Thank you," she said. "It *would* be less lonesome."

When she returned with an extra plate and cutlery, she had discarded her cooking-apron. This was out of respect to Martin. The plain black dress she wore showed her comely young figure to advantage. Martin had never seen her in black before, nor had he taken much notice of her physical charms. Their effect on him now was to distract his attention from the pie he had commenced to serve.

"I'm glad you've taken your apron off," he said. "White against black makes you look like a servant—though a very nice one. Black by itself suits you," he added with a furtive look at those gracious curves.

"I shall wear it for a year," she said with due solemnity, and began pouring out the tea.

Martin's powers of observation underwent a sudden increase. He noticed her hands. They were small, pretty and very clean. Considering the work she did this struck him as remarkable. They looked soft little hands. He pictured what they would look like with a ring or two on their fingers, perhaps manipulating a tea-set of real china on a plated tray. It showed the trend of his thoughts.

"Don't you like rings, Miss Metcalf?" he asked rather abruptly.

"Oh, yes."

"Why don't you wear some, then?"

"Because I haven't got any."

At that they both blushed, Rose especially. To hide his discomfiture, Martin forgetfully swallowed a mouth-

ful of tea so hot that it hurt his throat. Rose had never previously inspired him with any feeling of nervousness. It seemed absurd. Besides, she was nervous herself. It was absolutely silly to be nervous of a person who was nervous of you. He did not appreciate that this was the nearest he had ever been to the illogical sentiment of love. He made haste to change the subject.

"How did the funeral go off?"

Rose was a little startled. Momentarily she had forgotten her mother. The personal note in Martin's conversation had fluttered her. Her eyes brimmed.

"It was such a little funeral," she quavered. "You see, we've no relations. And there was only Miss Twit-chett, mother's old friend, in the carriage with me. . . . There were four wreaths. Yours was quite the most beautiful."

Martin felt rewarded for the five shillings which he had spent on that tribute of respect. After all, as he had calculated at the time, the sum barely covered sundry breakages extending over the period of his sojourn in the house—breakages for which he had never been charged. He had been quite sincere in inscribing the card attached to the wreath "With deepest sympathy"; but the sympathy had been for himself for the loss of a paragon among landladies.

"I'm glad you liked it." The words were modest, but the tone hinted self-satisfaction. "You were speaking of having no relations. Don't you think that's rather a blessing? When you have ambitions—want to get on in the world—relations are sometimes a bother. Relations without the same ideas as yourself, I mean. Seems to me they've a way of thrusting themselves in where they're not wanted, just because of the tie of blood.

There's Mrs. Peacock, my aunt"—Mrs. Peacock's summing-up of her nephew's character still rankled—"I can't help feeling ashamed of her. I wouldn't say that to anybody except you. But there it is."

"She's a character," was Rose's excuse. "People like her can afford to be themselves."

"She's never dressed," objected Martin.

"Oh, I've seen her dressed. Last time she came to tea with poor mother she had on a black satin dress with every hook and eye properly fastened. She wore an awfully good hat too, and a splendid feather boa. When I admired it, she wanted to give it to me."

"Oh, well," said Martin grudgingly, "perhaps she isn't as black—as when she isn't washed. I suppose it was a Sunday."

Some days would have to elapse before he would be able to forgive Aunt Polly for her plain-speaking. He went on with his tea. When the meal was finished and there was no reason for prolonging it, Rose got up.

"I'll clear away now," she said, and proceeded to do so.

When the table-cloth was folded Martin ventured:

"What are you going to do when you've washed up? Mending?"

Rose nodded.

"Then why not bring it in here? I—we ought to have a talk, I think."

He fidgeted about the room until she rejoined him. She found that he had pulled the sofa forward, nearer the fire. Martin had made up his mind. The prominence of the sofa indicated the way it was working—a sort of tactical support to the proposal he was about to make. He felt terribly awkward.

Rose took a corner of the sofa. She was a little timorous of Martin's rearrangement of it, vaguely conscious of something different in himself. But the change, whatever it was, was too subtle for her simple mind. She put it down to the effect of "a death in the family" and what she called "company manners."

Martin also sat on the sofa, looking at his boots and trying hard not to appear embarrassed. The mending Rose had brought in with her was not serving any good purpose. How, for instance, was he to obtain possession of her hand (a proceeding he deemed essential to what he wanted to say) when one of them was plying a formidable needle and the other was encased in a thick sock?

"Are those mine?" he temporized.

"Yes. You do make holes." Her attention was fixed ruefully on the heel which seemed to consist of one huge fissure. To repair it would be a labor, but a labor of love. How often had she not kissed his socks?

"You do a lot of work for me," he said appreciatively.

"I like work," she rejoined. She had not the faintest idea of the surprise he was going to spring on her.

After a thoughtful pause he went on:

"I shan't be able to stop on here."

The abruptness of the statement startled her. She stopped working and looked up at him.

"People would gossip," he explained.

She said nothing. She had already discounted the gossip.

"I don't like gossip," he proceeded. "I don't believe in giving people the opportunity of discussing your private affairs. They always find something to be nasty

about. Besides, I don't want people saying things about you."

Rose darned furiously. If she lifted her eyes he would see the tears in them. So he was going—after all!

"I'm going to be very frank," he said. "I didn't ever intend getting married to anybody. I didn't mean to think of it until I'd made a position. I'm not talking of two-ten a week. I mean something you can really call an *income*." He gave the word an unctuous inflection. "But since I came in this evening, things somehow have changed. I don't want to lose you, and I don't want you to lose me. How would it be if I was to stay at the Temperance Hotel for a week or so until we can get married—very quietly, owing to a death in the bride's family?"

Rose jerked her hand out of the sock. Her breath came fast.

"Martin!" she articulated. "You don't mean you—you—love me?"

He had moved nearer to her. If expediency had been the prime motive of his proposal, it was now succeeded by a more human one. Desire for the girl was fomenting in him. She was so pretty. He knew she would make a good wife. He had a conviction that as he improved his position in life—which was what he meant to do—she would show a capacity for living up to that improvement. She would be able to adapt herself to circumstances. She would learn from him. Her voice had proclaimed her feelings for him, told him that she loved him. Her face was averted now. She was trembling. Martin was trembling too. He had gone rather

pale, and his voice was unsteady when he answered her:

“I do love you. Oh, Rose!”

Unwonted emotion brought a mist into his eyes. He groped for her hand and found it. It *was* soft, so soft. The touch of it made him feel extraordinarily tender. He recalled how willingly, how often, those soft hands had toiled for him. And now those little hands were the hands of his own new-found sweetheart, his future wife! Human nature had hold of him. He found himself stroking the soft little hand, carrying it to his lips, moving it up and down against his cheek. . . . But he dared not kiss Rose’s lips. He simply dared not.

Neither knew how long they sat on in this state of bliss. Rose was tongue-tied. She could only feel. She was engulfed in huge waves of feeling, an ecstasy too deep for words. Her head lay against Martin’s shoulder, and her eyes were closed. When Martin came back to earth, the proximity of Rose’s face intensified his desire to kiss her. But even then he could not summon up courage enough. In the morning, he told himself, he would feel more confident. By then he would have had time to get used to things. . . .

“Well . . . so we’re to be married, dear,” he said in the tone of one confirming a business transaction. “I’ll get the ring to-morrow. We were talking about rings at tea, weren’t we? Coming events, eh?”

He got up, and Rose followed his example.

“Don’t go,” said Martin. “I’ve got a little reading to do.”

He placed his books—sound educational works—on the table, and, resolutely keeping his eyes from the girl’s

face so as to avoid the temptation of kissing her, applied himself to their study.

Martin never missed an opportunity of improving his mind. He had no particular love of knowledge for its own sake. At twenty-five he was a very self-contained young man, perfectly satisfied with himself, full of confidence in his abilities, imbued with a conviction that no man was warranted in regarding him as an inferior. Nevertheless, he saw plainly enough that if he was to impose his own estimate of himself on other people he must arm himself against them with knowledge, that he must know more than they did. With that object he read diligently and voraciously, cramming his mind with everything he could get hold of in the way of information. The result was the acquisition of an encyclopædic smattering of disconnected facts, formulæ, and theories. Every description of knowledge provided fish for his mental net—philosophy, art, political economy, statistics. They would all come in useful some day.

Just now he was busy memorizing masses of figures bearing on the conditions of trade and labor in their relation to capital. It was not that he was dissatisfied with the wages he got. On forty-five shillings a week he had nothing to complain of. But that was no reason why he should not study the subject with the object of getting the better of capital. Martin was as ready to sweat capital as capital did labor. To put it briefly, he was out to climb into the position of the top dog.

Thus immersed in figures he forgot time, everything. The hours passed. At ten o'clock Rose put her mending away. She moved quietly, fearful of interrupting the worker.

"Good-night," she said softly.

Martin was inattentive. He had made a mistake somewhere in his calculations and was bent on correcting it.

"Good-night, Miss Metcalf," he answered absently.

The door closed on Rose. Once outside she longed to go back. She did not resent Martin's inattention and his forgetful use of her surname. She thought she understood him. But her mind was centered on that kiss which he had not accorded her, and she longed for it. She had been too shy to offer him her own lips, and he too shy to take them. She knew that, just as she knew intuitively that he had never before kissed any other girl. She wanted that kiss. She felt it was her due.

She waited in her bedroom for half an hour without undressing. Then she heard him push back his chair and move about the room beneath. She could go down now without disturbing him. She would be bold. They would both sleep better with that kiss consummated. Without it she would not sleep at all.

She stole downstairs and softly opened the door of the sitting-room. Her heart beat tempestuously.

"Martin, you—we—haven't kiss——" she faltered and stopped short.

Martin was tasting something out of a bottle.

III

"ROSALIA"

ANY ONE but Rose would have jumped to the conclusion that Martin was indulging in a spirituous nightcap—any one, that is, of the class to which these young people belonged. Is it not the acknowledged privilege of the wage-earner to take a "glass of something" when the day's work is done?

But Rose did not for a moment suppose that the bottle contained anything alcoholic. She knew Martin too well. She would as soon have credited him with being an atheist. His two years' stay in her mother's house had convinced her of two things: his sobriety and his regular attendance at chapel. Martin, indeed, was an abstainer of the incorruptible type; he had an unreasoning detestation of strong drink. It was this view that had made him gravitate towards the mineral-water trade. Rose, moreover, noticed that the bottle was transparent, of the soda-water type, with a screw stopper, and the liquid in it rose-colored.

"I'm glad you came down," he said unconcernedly. "I thought you'd gone to bed. I had half a mind to knock you up. I want to know what you think of this. Now that we're going to be married I ought to try and get it on the market. I've had it up my sleeve for several months."

He took a tumbler from the sideboard and poured some of the liquid into it.

"What is it?" Rose inquired.

"A non-alcoholic summer drink. My own invention. You're the first person besides myself who's seen it. Taste."

She took a sip.

"Well?"

"It's delicious!" she declared.

Her enthusiasm was perfectly genuine. If he had asked her opinion of a concoction of mustard and jam as a new condiment of his own devising she would have discovered something to like in it. The drink she was now sampling had a certain nutty sweetness that appealed strongly to her uneducated palate. It seemed to have all the best qualities of the numerous temperance beverages with which she was familiar, and in addition a peculiar flavor of its own.

"Do give me some more," she begged.

"I'm afraid I can't. I want the rest to try on Mr. Peacock."

"But isn't he——"

"Yes. I know. It's just that. You see, the opinion of a confirmed drunk—drinker on a non-alcoholic drink might be valuable."

He had a suspicion that "vuluble" might be the better word. Still, it showed his faith in the new beverage to wish to submit it to Mr. Peacock's taste. He argued that if Mr. Peacock did not utterly condemn it, it would be sure to please any one else.

"I'm glad you like it," he said. "I believe there's a fortune in it. All I want now is a good name for it. A good name's everything in pushing a new line."

"How would 'Rosalia' do?" she ventured. She had not forgotten what had brought her downstairs, but it was evident that Martin's thoughts were far from endearments.

"'Ros-al-ia,'" he enunciated experimentally. "That's not bad. Sort of ale, and it's rosy. Personally, I was rather taken with 'Liquorine'—spelt with a 'k,' you know. I've got several others too. I must try them on some one. That's what made me think of Peacock. He comes out with a happy thought sometimes, without knowing it. By the way, be careful you don't let on about this new drink to any one."

"I won't breathe a word."

He put the bottle away in the cupboard where he kept his books, locked it and pocketed the key. It was characteristic of him that he always kept his private belongings under lock and key. Then he turned to Rose.

"There was something I wanted to say just before you came in," he said meditatively; "but it's gone out of my head. Did *you* come down for anything particular?"

"Martin—yes!" she whispered, and lifted her face.

* * * * *

"That was what I was trying to remember," he said.

IV

MARTIN GETS HIS MONEY'S WORTH

ONE of Martin's maxims was, "Never let the grass grow under your feet." He quite approved of the advertisements which inculcate the doctrine of "doing it now." He disliked Mr. Peacock excessively, but that did not prevent him from starting for his office a quarter of an hour earlier than usual so that he might stop at Aunt Polly's on the way for the purpose of eliciting her husband's opinion of the new beverage. It did not strike him that there was a touch of irony in administering a non-alcoholic drink to one who was chronically afflicted with a longing for potent liquors.

He would have preferred to avoid Aunt Polly herself, but as the only entrance to her private abode was through the shop he was unable to do so. As usual, he found her engaged in the apparently endless occupation of sorting cast-off clothing.

"What's brought you round so early, young Martin?" she inquired. "Thought better of it and come to live!"

"I came to see Mr. Peacock," he said. "I've got something to show him."

"He isn't quite himself this morning. You'll find him in the kitchen havin' his breakfast."

The statement was hardly accurate. Peacock, in effect, at that moment was sitting at the table regarding a fat rasher of bacon with concentrated disgust. He

was a corpulent little man who looked what he generally felt, rather vile. On Martin's entrance he pushed his plate away with a shudder.

"Good morning," said Martin briskly. His own good breakfast and the hope of exploiting his new drink made him feel energetic.

Peacock looked at him much as he had looked at the bacon, and gave another shudder.

"I just looked in to show you something," continued Martin.

His uncle by marriage did not pay any attention to the remark. He levered himself up from his chair and pointed a shaking finger at the shop door.

"That old woman ought to have been a jailer," he asserted hoarsely. "She's locked up the Worcester sauce."

"Don't you like tea for breakfast?"

"Tea? Pah!"

"Not thirsty, eh?"

The word brought an angry gleam into Peacock's eyes. He resented Martin with all the inebriate's resentment of one who is openly ranged on the side of hidebound sobriety. Martin's professed abomination of alcohol in all its forms enraged him. But knowing something of the young man's financial resources, and especially of his customary possession of small change, he was cunning enough to hide his feelings. All the same, to be asked by an incarnadined teetotaler at a quarter to nine a.m. if he was thirsty provoked him horribly. It seemed to him to be absolute proof of the mental density of every water drinker he came across.

For answer he clacked a parched tongue, gave a fur-

tive glance in the direction of the shop, and buttonholed Martin.

"Got sixpence about you?" he whispered. "Pay you back to-morrow."

Under the same promise Martin had parted with sixpences on several previous occasions, and never seen them again.

"I'll see," he temporized. "But if you're thirsty try this."

Peacock watched him anxiously while he extracted a bottle from his office bag.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A new drink. Perhaps you'll be able to give it a name."

"I can give *any* drink a name," asserted Peacock with confidence. He regarded the liquid, some of which Martin poured into his unused tea-cup, with intense curiosity. "Looks as if it had a dash of port in it."

"Try it."

The habit of taking a copious dose of anything presumably alcoholic made Peacock gulp down a goodly mouthful before his palate gave him any indication of its quality. Then an amazed expression came into his face. He alternately glared at Martin and choked.

"What d'you mean by it?" he wheezed. "Oh, you wicked poisoner!" He advanced aggressively.

"Don't get excited," said Martin. "What's wrong with it?"

"Wrong? You try and poison me and then ask what's wrong? I'll have you up for it, you see if I don't! Makin' me take pink muck they give to ruddy babies when they've got the blue-black stomach-ache!"

His vehemence and the nasty spirit in which he took the experiment annoyed Martin.

"There's no necessity for bad language," he protested. "The drink's perfectly wholesome. Miss Metcalf had some. She liked it!"

"I don't care if she did. She hasn't a delicate constitution like me. I say I'm poisoned, and I mean to know what with, so's I can get a antidote."

"I tell you it's a new drink. At present it's called Liquorine, if you must know."

Peacock snorted. "Strickernine's what it ought to be called. Strickernine! Only it's worse. It's filth, poisonous filth, that's what it is! You ought to be ashamed of yourself for bein' seen about with it."

"You needn't shout," Martin expostulated. "Here's sixpence."

Peacock grabbed the coin and subsided, and Martin beat a retreat. He considered Peacock's behavior outrageous. He would have shown his resentment of it but for an acquired habit of never allowing himself to lose his temper. He would boil inwardly at an affront and yet appear to be unaware of it. The slur Peacock had cast upon the new beverage rankled terribly. In his enthusiasm for it Martin had courted offensive treatment, and now regretted it. He also regretted sixpence wasted on the obnoxious little man.

To his relief, Aunt Polly was engaged with a customer when he re-entered the shop, and he reached his office with a minute to spare. It was a small and uninviting room whose one window looked on to a courtyard full of dark corners. An atmosphere charged with moisture permeated it. Across the yard, through double doors, now open, you got a view of several aerators at which

Grimwood Brothers' employees sat charging "minerals" with gas. The short, sharp hiss of the machines went on interminably throughout the day, making a sound not unlike what you would expect from a number of snakes in a bad temper. This was accompanied by the clink of thick glass bottles, varied now and then by a burst from defective ones. A constant trickle of water from the works percolated into the yard, filling the interstices between the cobbles and overflowing into a gully under the office window. The whole aspect of the place was unutterably dreary.

Quite indifferent to his surroundings, Martin set about his day's work. Mr. Alfred Grimwood, the junior member of the firm, looked after "the works"; Mr. John, the senior, occupied the office with Martin. He had not come yet. Pending his arrival, Martin unlocked the safe, got the books out, and opened the letters. These he read with an open pocket-book beside him, making notes of customers' names and their orders. Occasionally he took down quantities and prices of various items quoted in wholesalers' invoices. Many pages of Martin's notebook were filled with such details, very neatly recorded. They formed a fairly complete compendium of everything pertaining to the mineral-water trade. With characteristic foresight, he had equipped himself with much valuable data likely to come in handy if he should ever possess enough capital to start business on his own.

It was his intention to ask for a rise in salary this morning, and also to try and interest the "governor" in his new drink. After Peacock's unfortunate corruption of "Liquorine" into strychnine he thought it as well to avoid the use of that name for it. Instead, he would adopt "Rosalia," the one suggested by Rose.

But for an hour or more after his employer turned up he was too busy to introduce the subject of his own affairs. The correspondence of the first two posts had to be attended to. Luckily, among the letters arriving by the second of these was one containing an unexpectedly large order. It put the governor in a good temper. Martin took advantage of it.

"Have you thought about raising my salary, sir?" he asked.

"Can't say I have," returned Mr. Grimwood. "Why should I?"

"I've only had two increases in four years."

"I only had one in three when I was a young man."

Martin evaded the point. "I'm going to be married," he said.

"Oh, are you? Think you can afford it?"

"On three pounds a week I can. I think I'm worth it, sir."

"Well, I'll consider it," said Mr. Grimwood after a pause.

"To begin this month, sir. The wedding's to be next week."

"Oh!"

"There's another matter I want to speak to you about. It's a new summer beverage. I want you to take it up," said Martin with directness.

Mr. Grimwood shook his head. "It would have to be something uncommonly good to make me put money into it."

"It is uncommonly good."

Martin produced the bottle from his bag for the second time that morning. Mr. Grimwood held it up to the

light. Then he unscrewed the stopper and smelt the contents.

"What's it made of?" he asked carelessly enough.

Martin had been expecting the question and had not the slightest intention of answering it. The drink might or might not turn out a success, but he knew that if he divulged the nature of its ingredients Grimwood, or for that matter any other man in the business, would be capable of using it for his own profit.

"I shall be quite ready," he replied, "to hand over the formula directly we come to a business arrangement."

Grimwood quite understood the implication. He did not resent it. In Martin's place he would have taken similar precautions.

"And suppose we don't?" he said.

"Then I shall offer it in some other quarter. To Ortswells' first, probably."

Ortswells, Limited, were a rival firm with works in the vicinity.

"Well," said Mr. Grimwood placably, "let's taste it. Give me a glass."

Martin fetched one from the office cupboard, and Grimwood began tasting the beverage. He took a long time over it, trying to make out individual savors. Roughly, he detected one or two of them. But there was something else, something decidedly delectable, that he could not put a name to. In any case, one thing about the drink seemed fairly certain: it had a taking flavor and ought to be popular.

"What about the cost of manufacture?" he asked.

"Absolutely no more than ginger-ale or any other similar mineral."

"You guarantee that?"

"I do, sir. I know this business, and that it wouldn't pay to manufacture any drink that didn't give the usual profits."

"Of course, I shall have to discuss it with Mr. Alfred. The question is, How much do you want for the formula? We might—mind, I only say might—go to ten pounds."

"Then we can't deal, Mr. Grimwood." Martin screwed up the stopper, and made as though to replace the bottle in his bag.

"What do you suggest, then," came the question.

Martin had his terms all ready. The habit of taking notes of many transactions, from wholesale prices to agreement clauses, had educated all his business instincts. He at once propounded a scale of percentages on net profits, small at first but mounting on increased returns.

Grimwood whistled softly. "You're opening your mouth pretty wide, Leffley!"

"It's a fair sliding scale."

"A bit slippery, I call it. You forget the cost of advertising a new thing. It'll mean putting down hundreds to push it."

"Whatever's spent on this drink will come back a hundredfold," Martin asserted dogmatically. "Look here, Mr. Grimwood, this drink's a sure seller. It's got something in it that everybody likes and nobody's thought of but me. A thing—a fruit flavor—that's never been used in a popular drink before. It comes to this: Do you want it or am I to take it to Ortswells'?"

Grimwood had already made up his mind that Martin must not be allowed to take it to Ortswells'; so he called in his brother, and after consultation with him and con-

siderable haggling with Martin, the latter got his terms with slight modifications. These he insisted on having in writing before he would disclose his formula. The Grimwoods were very curious about the baffling ingredient. When Martin revealed it they stared at him.

"Cocoanut milk!" exclaimed the elder. "Why, it'll take millions of nuts to give us the quantity we should want! All the profits would go in cracking 'em!"

"Not if you get the milk synthetically," said Martin.

"But can we?"

Martin pointed to the drink. "There's the evidence of it," he declared. "The process isn't generally known, and the quieter it's kept the better."

He went into details that satisfied the partners. Then he changed the subject. He wanted an hour off during the afternoon for a little matter of private business.

"Can't it wait?" asked Mr. John.

"Not after four o'clock. I must be at Somerset House by then to get my agreement stamped."

"Humph!" grunted the head of the firm. "There are no flies on you, young fellow!"

It had not been a bad morning's work. Impending marriage, Martin decided, was a distinct stimulus to a young man's efforts at advancement in life. He rather flattered himself on the sagacity he had shown in making up his mind so quickly about Rose. Unconsciously she had already helped him to an increase in salary as well as possible profits. He patted the pocket that contained the agreement. Rose might certainly prove a real help-mate in the future.

He took advantage of the "hour off" accorded him to kill two birds with one stone. After getting his agree-

ment stamped at Somerset House he went to a registrar's and gave notice of his matrimonial intentions. Of the two errands the former held the more important place in his mind. He did not exactly think of it as a form of insurance against future risk, but it certainly heartened him in approaching the registrar.

A third measure—the purchase of an engagement ring—occurred to him, but he did not put it into execution at once. Martin never bought anything in a hurry. He first wanted to make comparisons, to get his money's worth. So for a day or two he went about pricing rings at various jewelers and giving special attention to the windows of pawnbrokers' shops. In one of these he at length saw a half-hoop of small diamonds, marked £7. He got it for £6 10s.

That Rose would not expect anything so valuable he knew quite well. The aspirations of an engaged girl of her class would have been satisfied with what is termed a "dress ring," a chased band of light gold set with cheap stones of the outside value of three pounds and generally not worth that. But Martin, in spending more than double that amount, had something else in view besides a gift to his betrothed. He considered he was making an investment. Rose herself was an investment: at least he hoped so.

Her awe, when he presented her with the ring, flattered his calculated judgment as much as it did his generosity. That she was impressed by his unexpected lavishness was what pleased him most. It placed him on a pedestal from whose height the exercise of domestic authority would come natural.

"It's much, much too good for me, dear!" she insisted tremulously.

"Ten years hence it won't be," rejoined far-seeing Martin.

He told her nothing of the price of the ring, nor whence it had come. In that he showed a curious inconsistency. Though he was ashamed of, and despised, Aunt Polly's traffic in second-hand goods, it never occurred to him that he had done anything unsuitable in choosing for his pledge of love an unredeemed pledge.



ROUTH VILLAS

SOON after their wedding the Leffleys moved. The new house—Martin's choice—reflected his taste. It was semi-detached, cost £26 a year, and, considering the quantity of stained glass in the hall door and the variety of architectural embellishment all over its frontage, looked a great deal for the money. Its most prominent feature was a small balcony projecting from the first floor level. All the other houses in Routh Villas had a similar balcony, but probably for the reason that they showed no visible signs of support nobody was ever seen on them.

The windows, draped by the newest and whitest of starched lace curtains, completely discouraged the inquisitive eyes of the passer-by. Only in the front room on the ground floor was this sign of privacy relaxed. There the curtains were slightly parted in order to reveal the indispensable window-pot of villadom. In every house along both sides of the street identical pots similarly placed were to be seen. Some contained an aspidistra, some a flowering plant, some a fern. Martin's fern, or rather Rose's fern in Martin's pot, was a little fresher than the others, but the pot, of a crude yellow, had a hundred counterparts.

The Leffleys' furniture was all brand new. Rose had sold her mother's Victorian belongings, so as to be able

to contribute towards the installation of the new home. Martin had done all the purchasing while she stood by and approved his choice. Only once had she mildly differed from him, expressing preference for a blue carpet for the "best room" in lieu of the drab-colored one he had selected. He pooh-poohed the blue carpet and she had at once given way.

Still, she was very proud of her house when she moved into it, of the fumed oak in the dining-room, the plush "suite" of state—meant to be looked at rather than used—in the front room where the pot with its fern stood sentinel at the window; the white furniture in her bedroom, and the bright little ground-floor kitchen with its shining new tin utensils and row of spotless enameled saucepans.

It was a large house for her to manage single-handed, because it was badly planned. The scullery did not adjoin the kitchen, and the larder was a long way from both. The coal-cellar was outside. There were two steep flights of stairs and large expanses of linoleum to keep clean. Having a housewifely conscience, it kept her continually on the go. Martin had no idea of the work it entailed. He only gloated over the general effect; the spotless linen, the shining brass, the polished linoleum.

Even after six months of married life he was unobservant of his wife's overworked condition. She was losing her color; her eyes looked tired. The change was not so obvious when he was with her. Then, love and pleasure at having him at home kept her bright and cheerful.

As a wife she was all that a man could wish for. Always she reflected Martin's moods, anticipated his needs. In the morning she was all vigilance to get him

off in good time for the office. His breakfast and his boots were never unready. At that hour of the day she seldom talked. She knew that his mind was occupied with the work before him, just as hers was concerned with the best way of cramming twelve hours of domestic labor into a ten-hour day. At one o'clock, when he came in to dinner, he only had time to eat and give a look at the newspaper. After office hours he sat and talked to her until supper-time; but about nine he would get out his books and lose himself in the study of the moment.

The increased salary he was drawing, combined with Rose's economies, permitted him to spend a considerable sum on books now. He was acquiring something of a library; text books and works of reference principally. With every desire in the world to get rich quick, Martin knew that he must bide his time. But as far as the acquisition of knowledge was concerned he was not similarly handicapped. He could draw on the resources of his brain to an unlimited extent. He was blessed with an excellent memory, which permitted him to cram up an immense variety of subjects in an astonishingly short time. To get an elementary knowledge of each, to be able to discuss its broad outlines with assurance, was all he considered necessary. Besides, text books were cheap and eminently quotable.

Just now he was "taking up" Socialism. In a way he was familiar enough with its propaganda. You cannot pass your days among artisans and operatives without picking up most of its shibboleth. But he had never been really interested in the politics of Socialism, and did not pretend to understand them. The cant of "government for and by the people" did not appeal to him,

nor did he believe in the equal rights of man. He was clear-sighted enough to see that that was a chimera, that there must always be a small intellectual class to lead and a large ignorant one to be led. He did hate the supremacy of rank and wealth, because he was envious of the people who possessed them, and in that sense he was susceptible to Socialism. But that susceptibility was a good deal discounted by his ambitions. The belief that one day he would himself possess wealth was strong in him. He meant to attain it. The means might not at present be visible, but he felt they would come. It followed, therefore, that it would not be to his advantage to identify himself with a party whose policy was admittedly robbery of the rich. As yet, he was too inexperienced to appreciate that a man may give specious public support to measures with which his private interests are quite at variance.

But none of these prejudices hindered him from wanting to acquire a working knowledge of the arguments for and against Socialism. With both at his fingers' ends, he would not only be able to judge between rival policies, but to fight the more securely against whichever of the two should be antagonistic to his future prospects.

Tough reading he found some of it; but his quick wits prevented him losing himself in the maze of philosophic reasoning. He just kept to essentials, and assimilated figures. After a month or so of this sort of study he felt equal to debating the merits and demerits of Socialism with any one but an expert.

Punctually every night at nine-thirty he would put his books away and invite Rose to sit on his knee. Then the housewife, the strenuous legal slave would once again

become a woman, the soft, sweet, clinging mate. . . . There was a latent strain of sensuality in Martin which marriage had awakened. He rejoiced in his wife's charms. His mind often dwelt on them secretly, greedily. Once he had thought little of women, and speculated about them hardly at all. Now he would often look at a pretty girl in the street, taking in the whole of her femininity.

Women had a new meaning for him. They were made pretty for the pleasure of men. They were soft because men were hard: curved because men were straight. They were the flowers of human creation, destined to bud, bloom, be fertilized, and to seed. And he, Martin Leffley, manager of Grimwood Brothers, part proprietor of "Rosalia," student of economics, was as much a lord of creation as the first man who invented the title for himself, or the first cock that ever crowed.

VI

MARTIN GETS A SHOCK AND IS SENT ON A SHAMEFUL ERRAND

IT is remarkable how willingly a woman, if so minded, will tackle a man's job. Probably the same spirit enables the ant to shoulder a burden disproportionate to its size, or the worker bee to carry on her unrewarded toil. Rose had set her heart on whitewashing the back room ceiling because Martin had observed that it was getting dingy.

"I'd do it myself if I were in in the daytime," he remarked. "It seems extravagance to pay a man. After all, it's not much more than a woman's job."

"I'd love to do it," said Rose.

"I wasn't meaning that," he demurred in rather a hurry. "Though it might amuse you—give you something to do while I'm out, eh?"

She assented eagerly, and on the following morning he left her with a pail of whitewash and a brush.

"Don't tire yourself," he said, as he kissed her. "Wonder if you'll get it done by the time I'm home? Still, don't hurry. I shan't be back to dinner. Grimwood has asked me to lunch. He wants to have a talk about the best way of advertising 'Rosalia.' So you won't have any cooking to do, for a change."

It did not occur to him that her own dinner might

require cooking. Women, he understood, liked to finish up the "cold bits" when they were alone.

With the whole day before her, Rose set to work with her usual will. It was not her way to scamp any of the ordinary housework, so not until the early afternoon was she able to commence the whitewashing. To reach the ceiling she had to stand on the top step of the folding ladder. She thought it was the height that made her giddy, but she kept on, valiantly plying the big brush until her arms ached. When she was halfway through her task she began to feel dreadfully sick. Yet, to leave off on that account seemed selfish. Martin would be so uncomfortable if he had to sit in a disordered room only partially whitewashed. If she could get it done by five o'clock she would have time to wipe over the linoleum and put down the rugs again.

But at five she was still on the steps, wielding her brush with ever-lessening strength. Her arms felt numb: her eyeballs ached. Nothing short of an earthquake or a dead faint would have made her give in then. A mania to keep on until she had used up the last drop of whitewash on the last square inch of ceiling took possession of her. What did her headache matter so long as she could please Martin?

At last the whole expanse above her, except one small discolored patch, was finished. As she mounted the steps for the last time her knees gave way under her. Quite suddenly the room went dark. A wave of sickly heat surged over her. The brush dropped from her nerveless fingers, and she tumbled off the steps, falling heavily.

Martin found her on the floor when he came in. At first he thought she must be dead, so inert was she. Only when he felt the feeble beat of her heart did that fear

leave him. In a bewildered way he understood that she had fainted. This was alarming enough, for, try as he might, he could not bring her to. Her face was absolutely bloodless and her lips blue. He dragged her on to the sofa and kept on calling her by name. At last she opened her eyes, moaning painfully.

"Martin," she whispered, "I want—a woman."

At short notice the only woman he could think of was Aunt Polly. He had hardly been near her since his marriage. Had he had his wits about him he would have hit on some other female.

"I'll run for Aunt Polly," he said nervously. "Can you wait alone for five minutes?"

She nodded faintly, and he sped off.

The moment Mrs. Peacock understood that Rose was ill she cut Martin short. She grasped what was amiss, and wanted no lengthy explanatory details.

"I'll come along at once," she said. "You'd better go and fetch the doctor. I can guess what's the matter with the poor thing. I've had my suspicions."

Martin looked dense.

"Hadn't you better tell Mr. Peacock you'll be out for a little?" he suggested, anxious lest that individual should want to come in search of her.

"Rubbish! He'll know I'm out when he finds I'm not in. We aren't softies, like you and Rose. Come along."

At all hours of the day Aunt Polly wore a bonnet—if you could call the disreputable head-dress which she affected by that name—so she required no preparation for going out. She went off at once in the direction of Martin's house, leaving him to fetch the doctor.

Rose was slowly dragging herself upstairs when she

arrived. By the time Martin got back with the doctor she had undressed the girl and put her to bed. Martin was told to go down to the kitchen.

He was worried at his wife's sudden illness, but he did not understand why she was ill. Now that he had done all he could for her he felt a certain resentment at her condition. She had never been ill before, at least not since he had known her. He could not conceive what had upset her. That was the worst of women, even the best of them: they got ill, and then everything in the house was disturbed. There was Aunt Polly . . . officious . . . ordering him about. It was most annoying. He wandered about the kitchen feeling badly treated. The singing of the kettle reminded him that he had not had his tea. Then he saw that it was ready for him. After he had gone out to fetch his aunt Rose had contrived somehow to see to it.

He sat down to it, telling himself that it would be foolish to go without his tea because Rose felt ill. Besides, she had put it there for him. That seemed to show that she could not be so very bad. He was filling a second cup when Aunt Polly came into the room. He did not like the look of her. She stood with her arms akimbo regarding him maliciously.

"Martin Leffley," she said severely, "if you ask me what I think of you, you're too mean for a man!"

"I don't understand," he rejoined uncomfortably.

"To think of your letting that poor girl go and nearly work herself to death! Whitewashing, of all things, at a time like this! It's next to murder!"

He put down the teapot. He was quite nonplused.

"Where's the doctor?" he mumbled.

"The doctor's gone. But I've got to stay—for to-

night at least. To-morrow you'll have to get a woman in. Rose is not to set foot to the ground for a week. If she gets better at all, that is."

Martin's mouth dropped.

"Is—is she really ill?" he faltered. "What is it? Don't stand staring at me, Aunt Polly."

"And you a married man!" Mrs. Peacock's contempt was withering. "Where do you look for babies? In the parsley-bed, I suppose!"

Martin was staggered. A baby! In spite of his generalizing concerning women and their functions, he had never consciously considered the possibility of Rose having a baby. At least not yet. He went hot all over. Aunt Polly's question had sounded like an accusation.

"You don't mean—she has a baby," he stammered. "When was it born?"

"Listen to the idiot! It won't ever be born now. At least, not this one. Oh, you wicked young man!"

She shook Martin angrily by the arm. Never in his life had he felt less master of a situation.

"But she didn't tell me——"

"Seems to me you're both too innocent to live," she interrupted. "Rose hadn't any experience. Girls don't always take notice. But that's no excuse for you. You've worked her like a willing horse, and now she's dropped. I've seen! I've guessed! Now I'm going back upstairs. No, you can't come."

"D-did you say you were going to sleep here to-night?"

Mrs. Peacock nodded.

"And—what about Mr. Peacock?"

"Well, if he's a mind to come round too, I suppose he can. He don't like being left alone long. He's been

seeing lizards lately, he says. Green ones with spotted tails."

Martin shuddered. Suppose Peacock did come! He would have to entertain him alone in the kitchen. He tried to persuade Aunt Polly to let him go up and sit with Rose, but she refused positively.

"There's something you can do, though," she said. "The doctor says that later on Rose ought to have champagne and some good brandy. You can go out and buy some now. Best to have it ready in the house."

Martin hesitated. "I can't do that, Aunt Polly," he said uncomfortably. "You know I'm a strict abstainer. Wine and spirits are against my principles."

Mrs. Peacock almost swelled to peacock-like dimensions in her wrath.

"Principles! Pah!" she ejaculated. "What do you know about such things as wine and spirits? You, who haven't got a taste for anything better than ginger-beer! Is it against your principles to let your wife get better? Don't let me hear any more of it." She pointed to the door. "Mind, one bottle of three-star brandy and two of champagne. There's a wine merchant's in the main road, or you can go to the pub. next door to us. Put some coal on the fire and be off."

Martin saw nothing for it but to do as he was told. If the doctor had really ordered wine and brandy he supposed they would have to be got. The worst of it was he couldn't absolutely rely on Aunt Polly's assertion that this was so. He knew Aunt Polly. She was quite capable of multiplying the doctor's prescription of a small bottle of champagne into two large ones, and of adding the brandy while she was about it. It seemed an inordinately large order for an invalid. Up there in

the bedroom, how was he to know how the liquor would go? Besides, he had a conviction that Aunt Polly would derive much grim satisfaction from making him put his hand in his pocket for strong drink.

He was in such a depressed state of mind when he went out that he passed the wine merchant's without noticing it. A little further on was the public-house adjoining the Peacocks'. He thought he might as well get what he wanted there. In the saloon bar a young woman, whose elaborate coiffure of straw-colored hair overawed him, languidly handed him what he asked for and watched superciliously while he stowed the bottles into his various pockets. He was poorer by the best part of a sovereign when he came out, his coat bulging suspiciously.

Imagine his annoyance, therefore, when his eyes lit on the ineffable Peacock. The little unshaven man was standing on his doorstep thirstily surveying "The Feathers." When he caught sight of Martin emerging from its convivial doors he was transfixed with astonishment. Martin almost bolted back again.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Peacock, as he came forward. "Is it you, Leffley?"

Martin nodded moodily, and tried to pass on; but Peacock stood in the way.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing to interest you."

The grumpy reply did not shake Peacock off. He took it to mean that Martin did not like being caught issuing from a public-house. It also satisfied him that Polly's nephew was not the irreproachable teetotaler

he pretended to be. He was not going to waste such a tactical advantage.

"Sly dog!" he winked, and then put on an expression of preternatural wariness. "All right. I'm mum. Shan't give you away. Come on in again."

Martin shook his head. "I'm in a hurry," he objected.

Peacock was easily able to credit that. Had *he* been weighted down with several bottles of good liquor—the neck of one of them, bearing the heavenly device of a constellation, protruded from one of Martin's pockets—he, too, would have been in a hurry.

"I don't mind if I come a bit of the way with you," he said ingratiatingly.

"I'm going home, and I shan't be able to ask you in. My wife's ill. Aunt Polly's with her. She's going to stay the night."

Peacock jumped to conclusions. "Oh, so you're all going to make a night of it!"

"Nothing of the sort. The—er—wine I've got here was ordered for my wife by the doctor."

"Good Lord!" Peacock's face was a study. "D'you think he'd order me three-star brandy if I was took ill? What's his address?"

"I don't remember. I can't stop now. Look here," said Martin in desperation, "if you're short of change——"

"I am—chronic."

"Well——"

The half-crown change out of Martin's sovereign, the only coin he had left in his pocket, disappeared into the little man's unwashed paw.

"Martin," he declared emotionally, "you're a good feller. Go' bless you! See you later."

The swing-door of "The Feathers" fell to behind the toper. Martin felt pretty sure he would see nothing more of him that night.

VII

AUNT POLLY'S SERMON

IN the days that followed, Aunt Polly ruled at 17 Routh Villas. Martin found it most unpleasant. When he was not ordered about he was ignored. He resented the loneliness forced on him, the necessity of getting his own meals, his obvious unimportance in the domestic scheme.

Aunt Polly was also firm in preventing him seeing Rose. When he rebelled she flew at him. "That was all the thanks she got for neglecting her business in order to do him and his wife a kindness! The ingratitude of it!" Martin could hold his own with most people, but Aunt Polly was too many for him. She had an extraordinary capacity for putting a half-truth in a nutshell, and firing it off on the least provocation. He was never ready for this kind of offensive. It was like being sniped at.

There is no knowing when he would have seen Rose but for the accidental absence of his aunt. A message came informing her that Peacock was making free with the contents of the shop and investing the proceeds at "The Feathers." Aunt Polly's misfortune was Martin's opportunity. The moment she was out of the house he stole up to the sick room. Rose was asleep, but with an infelicitous expression in her face, as though her dreams were not quite happy ones. Martin could see

that she had been very ill. She had grown much thinner. He stood looking at her with mixed feelings. That she had escaped maternity through an accident was his chief thought. It provided him with a curious sensation that was something of a thrill of emotion, but still more a feeling of relief. Until his financial position had become more assured he was glad to have avoided the responsibilities of fatherhood.

The creaking of his boots as he tiptoed about the room woke Rose up. Directly she saw who it was the troubled look left her face, giving place to one of blissful surprise.

"I was dreaming of you," she murmured. "I've been lying worrying how you were managing all this time."

"Silly girl," he mumbled, as he bent down and kissed her. "Feeling better? You've given us no end of a time, Rose."

"I'm so sorry, dear. You see, I—didn't know."

"It mustn't occur again."

"Oh!" She hid her face in the pillow.

"We've married young," he went on, sitting on the edge of the bed; "but we mustn't be hampered with a family. At least, not yet."

She did not argue with him. Whatever he decreed was right in her eyes. She was ready to be the fruitful vine or the barren fig-tree, whichever he wished. He was so wise.

"After all, this ought to be a rest for you," he said.

"I can't rest. I lie and worry. I wish Aunt Polly would let me get up. It's the day for waxing the linoleum; and to-morrow it's the flues." She looked distressed. "And what did you have for your dinner?"

"Bread and jam."

He kept self-commiseration out of his tone, but he made no effort to conceal a look of martyrdom.

"Is that all?" she asked in a horrified tone.

"I made some tea, but there was no milk."

"Goodness!" She reached for the bowl of beef-tea that stood among the medicine bottles on her bed-table.

"Take this," she urged. "I don't want it really. Please, do drink it!"

"Sure you can't take it?"

"I'm not hungry. You never get hungry lying in bed."

As a matter of fact her appetite was returning. She knew it as she watched him taste the beef-tea. There was toast in it. He was very partial to broth and toast. He did not hurry over the delicacy. Between spoonfuls he told her of the chaos downstairs, and listened to her regret at being the cause of it. He was still sitting on the bed with the bowl all but empty when Mrs. Peacock unexpectedly came back. At sight of him she came to an indignant stop, and then with a quick movement snatched it out of his hand.

"Well, I never did!" she exclaimed. "You're like a greedy dog eating up the cat's dinner! Out you go!"

She drove him before her to the door, ignoring his protests as well as Rose's. When a last push had effected his exit and the door was shut in his face she turned on Rose.

"Giving him your invalid food! What'll you be doing next?" she demanded.

Rose's lip quivered. "He can't live on bread and jam, Aunt Polly. B-brain-workers want more."

"Brain-worker indeed! *Woman*-worker's more the word. Why, I'd sooner have a husband like Peacock,

who drinks, than one like Martin, who only *thinks*! It's no use your getting your dander up, my girl. I won't have him taking advantage of you. I told him he wasn't to see you yet awhile, and the moment my back's turned up he comes. The doctor knows what's best for you, and so do I, and I say I won't have it."

Trading on the doctor's orders and her own autocratic will, she was as good as her word. For a week more Martin had a miserable time. A charwoman was imported into the house to "do" for him, so that Mrs. Peacock might divide her time between Rose and the shop. The charwoman's cooking was deplorable. Martin was unable to eat what she set before him; and being too superior to cook for himself he had to put up with sardines and cheese and jam at nearly every meal. It made his mouth water to see the wholesome and delicious things that were taken up to Rose's room. Besides the champagne, she had jars of beef-tea and jelly, chicken and expensive-looking grapes. Martin worried about the cost of these delicacies, and at last summoned up courage to speak to Aunt Polly about them.

"Of course I want Rose to have strengthening things," he said; "but I hope you'll consider the expense. I never like to have what I can't afford to pay for."

"You're not asked to pay for them," rejoined Mrs. Peacock tartly. "At least, not for the grapes and such-like. Mrs. Wybrow sent them."

"Who's Mrs. Wybrow?" he demanded suspiciously.

"The Vicar's wife. St. Gregory's."

Martin was disturbed. His hatred of intemperance was only equaled by his abhorrence of "the Church." The goings on at St. Gregory's were the talk of his

chapel-going world. At St. Gregory's they had candles—tall Roman candles—incense, mass and other abominations.

"If I'd known that I wouldn't have allowed it," he said nastily. "I object to being under obligations to those people. I——"

"Those people! That'll do, young Martin. And don't you start giving me advice. I belong to St. Gregory's myself; and seeing that your chapel folk didn't do anything I told Mrs. Wybrow I had a niece lying ill through her husband letting her whitewash ceilings when she was in a delicate state of health."

Martin opened his mouth in protest, but Mrs. Peacock went on the louder:

"And don't you say nothing against St. Gregory's. I've heard your remarks about the 'hellish reek of incense,' and I'm not going to listen to any more of it. It'd do your nasty chapel good if they used it there; though, if you ask me, a good wholesome disinfectant would be better. I tell you the incense at St. Gregory's on Sundays is that good it makes me forget the smell of old clothes all the week. Yes, and the bell that's rung before the bread and wine puts me in mind of the bell they ring before meals in gentry's houses."

Martin's face was white with suppressed indignation.

"That's blasphemy!" he said in a shocked tone.

"Nothing of the sort! If the Almighty has a house—and the Bible says He's lots of them—it's only fitting there should be servants and bells and bowings as well. But there, you don't understand anything about gentry, and never will, as I've told you before. That's why I don't hold with your religion. There's no proper respect in it." (Mrs. Peacock gave a disparaging sniff.)

"Shakin' hands with God and calling Him your Friend and Brother, like the Kaiser used to. Fancying yourselves and thinking yourselves the elect, mucky cocoa and all! *That's* blasphemy, if you like!"

All this had been rankling in Aunt Polly's bosom for a long time. She welcomed the opportunity of unburdening her feelings. Martin had turned his back. He was staring out of the window, controlling his tongue between tight lips; but he raged inwardly.

"I'm going to confession on Sunday," proceeded Aunt Polly, rubbing it in.

Martin whipped round.

"I want advice. I'm going to put before Father Wybrow about you and Rose: how you work her and how she'll fall ill again as sure as fate. Don't blame me for going to him. It's not a bit of use talking to *you*."

Martin writhed at the idea of his private relations with Rose being discussed by a stranger. That such confidences were to be made under the seal of confession aggravated the indiscretion into an offense against decency and religion. He felt he must put a stop to it at all costs, even though that meant humbling himself before Aunt Polly.

"I'm quite ready to hear what you have to say," he said with forced mildness.

"Then I'll say it. What help are you going to give Rose when she comes downstairs? Are you going to clean your own boots? I've noticed there hasn't been much shine about them since she was took ill. Are you going to do windows and flues? Are you going to cart up the coals of a morning? Not you! You wouldn't lift a finger so long as somebody else'd slave for you!

You ought to have been a blackamoor—one of those heathens who takes to his bed when his wife has a baby, and makes her go on with the work. You ain't white at heart, Martin."

Her tongue hurt him like a lash; all the more because he knew that what she said had a substratum of truth in it. He had anticipated something of the sort from her, so he took it lying down.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked placably.

"Have a woman in regular for two or three hours every day."

He thought of the state of the kitchen at that moment. The charwoman had left the range unblackened, the sink coated with filth, the crockery greasy and finger-marked. There was evidence of the dirt and disorder she had created wherever he looked. And for that she had had to be paid eighteenpence a day and regaled with two solid meals! He did some quick calculating.

"Rose wouldn't put up with a charwoman any more than I should," he said. "And if I did the rough work I should be tired out when I got to the office. You can't expect me to neglect the work by which I get my living. I must see if I can't think of some alternative."

To herself Aunt Polly had to admit there was some reason in this. If Martin could find an alternative, well and good. She saw that she had brought him to heel, and that mollified her.

"P'raps I'll put off going to confession," she conceded. "Depends on that alternative of yours, though."

VIII

A FIRST STEP TO GENTILITY

ON the morning when Rose felt well enough to get up she promised herself a busy day. She said nothing of her intentions to Martin; in fact, she agreed to lie in bed until she had had her breakfast. He brought it up himself and left her eating it before he started for the office. Aunt Polly had gone to her own home the night before, and this was the first time he had been able to do anything for Rose without his aunt's supervision. Partly because that was now withdrawn and especially because of the appetizing look of the breakfast tray, for which she gave him all the credit, Rose could not thank him enough for waiting on her. Martin accepted her gratitude as though it were his due, merely remarking:

"You'll find a bit of a surprise when you get downstairs. No, I can't stop to answer questions. Wait and see."

He kissed her and departed. Rose thought she heard voices downstairs, but the sound of the hall door being shut came to her immediately, and she supposed Martin had been speaking to some one in the street. As she got out of bed and began to dress she distinctly heard movements in the house. Not unnaturally she connected Martin's vague hint of a surprise with those mysterious movements. She could not imagine what caused them,

and hurried. Every now and then she had to rest, as sudden weakness, due to her illness and several days in bed, assailed her. Her lack of strength disappointed her. She began to fear that she would not be able to undertake any work when she got downstairs.

All but dressed, she was sitting on the edge of the bed, when there came a knock at the door. The unaccustomed sound made her hold her breath. Then the door opened, and her astonishment was complete.

A maidservant stood on the threshold. Not a slip of a girl such as she had seen at some of the front gates of the more prosperous residents in the street, but a capable-looking young person in the twenties, in a neat print dress, white apron and cap. The cap, more than anything else, held Rose's gaze. It was not a mere rosette of muslin and make-pretense of the badge of servitude, tucked out of sight amidst a mass of hair, but a proper and simple cap without any false pride about it. It impressed her very little less than livery would have done, supposing she could have imagined herself being waited on by a manservant at all. The girl carried a small tray with a glass on it.

"Good morning, ma'am," she said. "I thought you might like a glass of egg and milk. I didn't know you were getting up."

"Good morning. . . . Thank you," Rose stammered. "Who are you? I thought I heard some one downstairs, but Mr. Leffley didn't say who it was."

"I'm the new maid, please 'm—Jane. Mr. Leffley engaged me last night at the registry." She smiled pleasantly. "I'm sorry you've been ill, 'm. The kitchen's quite straight and the brasses done and the front

step. How much milk would you like taken in for the afternoon?"

"A pint and a half, please. And—and don't trouble to do any more." Rose was flustered and shy. "I—I suppose Mr. Leffley engaged you by the day, until I'm stronger?"

"Oh, no, 'm. I've come a month on trial. The master said if I suited you I was to stay on. I'm sure I'll do my best, 'm."

"Thank you." Rose felt terribly embarrassed and quite bewildered. "It's rather a surprise. I've never had a servant, and didn't expect one," she added naively.

She drank the egg and milk. It was nicely warmed and flavored with nutmeg. Jane took the empty glass.

"Would you mind telling me what the master will have for his tea? He said he wouldn't be able to be in to dinner."

"I'll see to that," said Rose. She did not intend to relinquish all her household duties at one fell blow, even if Martin *had* done such an amazing thing as to engage a servant. A servant! The idea overpowered her. As she had said, she had never had a servant and, what is more, never expected to have one. So unused was she to the idea of being a mistress that she felt quite uncomfortable in the presence of the deferential and well-mannered young woman. She began drawing comparisons between herself and Jane, and found herself coming to the conclusion that socially there could be little difference in their position. A recognition of that fact prompted her next words.

"And as he won't be in to dinner we may as well have it together—in the kitchen."

Jane got a little red.

"Hadn't I better lay it for you in the parlor, 'm?'"

"Oh, no. That would be unsociable. I can't have you feeling lonely if you're going to stay with us." She gave Jane a bright smile, glad to have made it clear that she was no upholder of class distinctions. "We must work together and be friends," she went on. "Why, you're about my own age, aren't you? Twenty-one?"

"Twenty, 'm."

"Then I'm a year older."

After that Rose quite recovered her equanimity. It did not occur to her that she was adopting a particularly democratic attitude towards Jane, or one which Martin might object to. As yet, Rose had not assimilated Martin's ambitions or even his worldly views. Directly she had recognized that Jane belonged to the same grade of life as herself she had no intention of treating her as an inferior just because she was "in service." Rose would probably have gone into service herself had her mother not needed her at home. Supposing Jane were to stay on, a matter that could not be decided until Martin came home, that would be no reason why she, Rose, should give up housework. She liked the idea of having the companionship and help of a girl of her own age during the hours when Martin was at the office.

Her first sensation on getting downstairs was one of relief to find everything in spick and span order. Presently came the almost unbelievable but gratifying revelation that housework could be accomplished without personal effort. She understood for the first time in her

life what it felt like to be an employer of labor. The novel sensation of possessing a maid struck her as the height of luxury.

There was nothing for her to do. Brass twinkled a welcome to her. The linoleum had a surface like parquet. The kitchen looked as if it had never been used. Even the window-plant in the front room had been watered. Jane seemed a marvel. No one but Martin could have made such a selection. Rose's loving heart swelled with pride in him. She thanked God for having given her such a husband. He had done this out of love and consideration for her. The thought made her feel unworthy of him, more humble of heart than ever. She would have been astonished had anybody told her that she underestimated herself and credited Martin with virtues which he did not possess. But then Rose was one of those gentle-hearted women who are born to be dominated by a man of cold intellect. Hers was the individuality of small steady candle-light which is obscured directly it comes into proximity with the garish glitter of gas.

So, without any loss of self-respect, she took dinner in the kitchen with Jane, and afterwards held counsel with her concerning a multitude of domestic details. With Jane's help, too, she prepared a particularly appetizing dish of macaroni for Martin's tea. Then she sat still and waited for him. There was nothing else to do.

When he came in she was very nearly inarticulate in her endeavor to make him understand how gratified she was at his thoughtfulness in providing her with a servant. She was all demonstrative affection. Martin felt very pleased with himself. Here was Rose, well

again, a competent maidservant in the house, and Aunt Polly once more at a safe distance. "Rosalia," moreover, was making headway. That afternoon he had paid into the bank his first considerable share of the profits derived from it. Sitting now in the comfort of his own home with everything once more going smoothly, he felt in the best of humors.

"I thought you'd like Jane," he said. "Her character was excellent. We're to pay her eighteen pounds a year, but I can afford that."

Such wages staggered Rose. In her walk of life ten to twelve pounds were considered ample for a general servant. Then there was her keep: say a further fifteen pounds a year at least. And Martin appeared to regard the additional expense a trifling matter! How could he possibly afford it?

"Has anything happened? Has your salary been raised?" she asked, full of wonder.

"No, not my salary. It's better than that. Money's coming in from 'Rosalia.' I had a check to-day from it. Thirteen pound six. My share on the sale of seven hundred dozen. And, mind you, that's only a beginning. The stuff's caught on. Grimwoods' are awfully pleased. Directly the hot weather begins they expect the sales will go up enormously. There's no knowing what they'll amount to. That's why Mr. John asked me to lunch to-day. He took me to the 'Contadini.' Really it was a dinner—*hors d'œuvre*" (Martin stumbled over the French words, Greek to Rose), "soup, fish, something like a small steak with sauce and vegetables round it—awfully good; camembert cheese and as much delicious French bread as you liked to take. There was a wine called Chianti, in a funny-shaped bottle done up in

wickerwork. Of course I only drank water. And then we had black coffee. One-and-six each, without counting the wine and coffee, but of course Mr. John paid. I thought it wonderful at the price. We must go there one day."

Rose's eyes had been growing rounder and rounder.

"Martin! It sounds splendid! And 'Rosalie' too! I never thought . . ."

"I always knew it was a good thing. I shouldn't be surprised if it brought us in a regular income before long. That's why I engaged Jane."

"Not altogether. You did it partly because of me. I know." She gave him a look of adoration. "You wanted me to take it easier. It was sweet of you, dear; but directly I'm strong again I can do without a servant. I love work. Really I do. I should be lost without it. Not that it isn't nice to have a respectable girl in the house. It's company. Jane and I had dinner together."

Martin stopped eating. If Rose had not been convinced that he was the best-tempered man on earth she would have seen that the expression on his face was one of intense annoyance.

"You oughtn't to have done that," he said in a tone of suppressed irritation. "Servants should be taught to keep their place. It's a bad beginning. It mustn't occur again. You've got to think of your position."

Rose's face clouded over.

"I didn't think you'd mind, Martin." After a little pause she said: "It isn't as if we were gentry."

"We're gentry to her, or what comes to the same thing, a lot better than she is. But that's not the point. If we're to get on we've got to keep separate from her class. Money's the only thing that counts nowadays."

I mean to have money; but that won't get me the position I want if you don't learn to be a lady."

The harsh tone and the arrogance which it expressed made Rose wince. Martin, in this vein, was new to her.

"Aren't you satisfied with me?" she asked in a troubled voice.

"Of course I am. But I'm not going to be satisfied with staying on in a small semi-detached villa within a stone's throw of Aunt Polly all my life. I only think of this as a beginning—a small beginning."

"It's like a nest. . . ." Rose's lips trembled. "I don't want anything better."

"Yes, you do," he insisted; "only you don't realize it. You don't realize that I'm working for the future. If we're not gentry now we're going to be as good as gentry later on. What do you think I've been educating myself for, except that? A man with brains and application can get anywhere nowadays, even into Parliament. Look at the Labor Party there. Not one of them's got more ability than I have, and most of them can't pronounce their h's. I don't make that mistake. And I'm not going to make the mistake of *looking* like one of them. Directly I can afford it I'm going to dress like a gentleman, and you're going to dress like a lady. We don't want flash things, but they must be good stuff, not ready-mades. Once upon a time a gentleman was known by his suit of armor. Now good clothes and a silk hat mean the same thing—the trappings of knighthood, so to speak. Wouldn't you like to be seen in silks and furs and hear people whisper as you pass, 'Her husband's M.P. for So-and-so'?"

Rose shook her head. Such ambitions were quite

beyond her. She lifted soft eyes to meet Martin's hard, calculating ones.

"I'd rather hear them just say, 'That's the wife of Martin Leffley,' " she answered humbly.

IX

MARTIN ENTERS THE POLITICAL ARENA

ONCE Martin had let Rose into the secret of his ambitions it came easier to him to talk about them. He often did so now, telling her of what he hoped and meant to do. Talk helped to illuminate the road to success and to stiffen his determination to travel it. Rose got used to it. She thought of it as a sort of magnificent dream, a grown-up make-believe, like dressing up when you are a child and pretending to be somebody else.

Of course she knew Martin was in earnest when he spoke so ardently of the future, but his talk of money and position and getting into Parliament never really moved her. Such prospects were not real to her. They might carry her away while she listened; but so did an exciting novel, until she put it down to see to something in the kitchen. After all, she and Martin were quite young, and it was good for young people to have enthusiasms.

But Martin was very much in earnest. Talk was only his safety-valve; it let off the steam of his superabundant energy: the real pressure within drove him along the political road. He attended meetings and got into touch with Organizations—those of the local Labor and Radical parties. They both regarded him as an “earnest young man.” The reputation was easily acquired by a few helpful “Hear, hears” and the occasional seconding

MARTIN ENTERS THE POLITICAL ARENA 71

of a resolution that hung fire. Martin was never at a loss for words, and though his views at this period were expressed in hackneyed phrases they were not much worse than the torrent of platitudes which fell from the lips of his political associates.

One night he made a speech at a Radical meeting. He had not gone to it with that intention, but in putting a question to the "Chair" and getting an unsatisfactory answer, he let himself go in a rambling but fluent statement of his view of the matter under discussion. He was "out of order" in speaking from the body of the hall, but his characteristic assertiveness secured him a hearing. It was something in the nature of a "rights of man" speech, and more truculent than he was aware of.

When the meeting broke up he was accosted by one of its chief supporters, a man who had occupied a seat on the platform. All Martin knew of him was his name, that he was a well-to-do retail chemist and a person of prominence in local political circles.

"Allow me to congratulate you on the remarks you made, my dear sir," he said, with a warm grasp of the hand. "Very able, very able indeed."

Martin felt flattered. It was the first time the trite adjective had been applied to himself. To speak of a man as "able" was high praise among the local orators. They used it indiscriminately in eulogy of Cabinet Ministers and County Councilors.

"Thank you, Mr. Liversidge," he said. "You can't say much in five minutes, though."

Liversidge, who had no oratorical ability, thought differently. He envied Martin his gift of the gab. All he said was:

"Are we going the same way?"

Routh Villas lay in the direction of his own brand-new, red-brick dwelling, which contained twelve rooms and a conservatory and was called "Myholme." Martin fell into step with his new acquaintance.

"I'm a plain man," said the latter, when they had got out of the crowd surrounding the doorway, "and I hope you won't take offense if I say what's in my mind? The fact is, I want to give you a bit of advice. Don't take it if you'd rather not. It's well-meant, though. Now unless I'm wrong—say straight out if I am—you've not taken up with politics very long!"

"To-night was the first time I've spoken."

"So I thought. Not that what you said wasn't to the point. Quite the contrary. In fact, as I said before, your remarks were most able."

Martin mumbled acknowledgment. He wondered what was coming.

"Still, is it altogether wise of you to identify yourself so strongly with the policy of reaction?"

"I wasn't aware——"

"Just so. Nobody in a first speech quite does himself justice. I felt sure you weren't as socialistic as your words made out."

"No, I'm not a Socialist. At least, not in the accepted sense."

"Oh, we're all Socialists in *theory*," admitted Liver-side speciously. "All Liberals, that is. Equal opportunities and justice for everybody according to his position is a very proper view. But you went further than that, my young friend. You rather gave the impression of wanting to make an attack on the—er—commercial interests of the country. Mind you, I'm no supporter

of vested interests. People who don't work for their living have no sympathies from me. I've been a hard-working man myself, and——"

"But," Martin put in, a little perplexed, "my attack was *only* against vested interests: the land-owner, the mine-owner, and such-like."

"Yes, but you didn't discriminate. Now take a man like me. I own chemist and druggist shops: a strictly cash business; small profits and quick returns. Well, I make a little money, and I have to invest it—a bit of land or household property here, a few shares in a good colliery there. You don't want to rob *me*, you don't want to tax *me* out of existence, simply because I invest legitimately?"

Martin shook his head in polite negation.

"And it's not only me; it's thousands of others in my position. I daresay I might even go so far as to include yourself. You're doing well at Grimwood Brothers, I understand—I know something about you, you see. Well, that'll lead to other things in time. You'll get on and you'll make money. There aren't too many safe investments, mind you. Take land. It doesn't depreciate and it can't run away. It's safe. You'll want to buy your own house one day, and perhaps a little place in the country, or take an interest in a likely building estate. Well, you'll want to *keep* it, whichever it is. Anyway, you'll not want to see it taxed twenty shillings in the pound!"

Among the hopes that Martin nourished was that of the possession, one day, of a house of his own. He had not dwelt on it unduly because of the many other aims that filled him. But now that Liversidge—a man of ripe commercial knowledge—gave it concrete expression,

he had an uncomfortable feeling that he had allowed political ardor to clash with his private interests. For once in a way he felt rather an ass. He was debating the extent of this indiscretion when he suffered another mental shock. Coming towards them, under the glare of a street-lamp, he beheld Aunt Polly and her husband. Peacock was more than usually inebriated. He swayed about the pavement. He was unmelodiously whining the chorus of a popular song.

A more ill-timed incident Martin could not conceive. It made him ashamed and indignant. How he was to avoid the disgusting encounter he did not know. Peacock was never too drunk to recognize his only respectable relation-in-law. It was too much to hope that the Peacocks would pass on without speaking. Martin deliberately averted his eyes. Beyond a glassy stare from the tippler and one of indignation from Aunt Polly nothing happened. The nightmare vision receded. Apparently Liversidge had not observed it. Still, it was all Martin could do to pick up the broken thread of their conversation.

"I wasn't altogether considering myself," he prevaricated, without for a moment deceiving the astute tradesman.

"No, no, of course not. But you must. You're married, and later on no doubt you'll have a family to consider. The women and the little children should always come first." (This in an unctuous tone.) "We must consider those that come after us. And remember, God helps those who help themselves."

"It's difficult to reconcile our duty to ourselves as well as to others," admitted Martin.

What he really meant was the difficulty of reconciling

MARTIN ENTERS THE POLITICAL ARENA 75

preaching with practice, which was just the dilemma Liversidge wanted him to appreciate.

"It is," he rejoined. "It's the problem we've all got to face, Leffley. I've had to struggle with it myself. Thank God, I've seen my way to solve it."

Martin, very interested, was about to ask how when Liversidge changed the subject.

"By the way," he said, "you don't attend my chapel—the new one in Marchmont Street? You ought to. Mr. Whipple, our minister, is very sound and extremely eloquent." He stopped and held out his hand. "I fancy we part here. I'm very glad to have made your acquaintance. We must see more of each other."

"Thank you," said Martin. "I should like to."

They said good-night, and Liversidge crossed the road.

It had been a memorable evening to Martin, even allowing for the danger he had run in encountering the Peacocks. An encouraging impression of being on the borderline of good fortune pervaded him. His speech had gone well. It seemed to him to compare favorably with some others delivered from the platform. At any rate, he had showed no hesitation—none of the ha-ing and hum-ing so frequent with more experienced speakers. Much reading and his good memory had been of incalculable aid to his delivery. There were bits that he had quoted wholesale, the cream of the text-books. They had gone down as his own, and been received with that unanimous murmur of appreciation which is often more satisfying than vociferous applause.

But what convinced him more than anything else that he had made a hit was the recognition Liversidge had given him. It gratified him immensely. He felt it had significance, though in what respect he was not sure. It

was enough for the moment to know that a man of importance had gone out of his way to be amiable. That he was the "biggest" man in the locality, and the chief supporter of the Marchmont Street chapel was common knowledge. So was his influence in Radical political circles. To have interested Liversidge without seeking to do so was a distinct feather in Martin's cap. All the same, he could not help being puzzled by the wealthy chemist's unorthodox views concerning taxation. It was curious.

Martin could not make it out.

X

AUNT POLLY TAKES OFFENSE

ANY excuse was good enough for Peacock to delay putting on his collar of a morning. If he intended remaining at home he saw no necessity for wearing one at all. It constricted his neck. Perhaps that was why Mrs. Peacock insisted on his appearing in one when he went out. It might possibly diminish his thirst.

At eleven o'clock on the morning after Martin's meeting with Liversidge, Peacock was still collarless. It was a Saturday. The *Sentinel*, the leading newsheet of the district, appeared on that day, and it was Peacock's rule to make himself acquainted by means of its columns with local happenings. He had it outspread before him now. Mrs. Peacock was doing something over the kitchen fire.

"Well, of all the——!" Peacock's voice and his unfinished remark indicated stupefaction.

"What's wrong now?" demanded his wife without turning.

"I s'pose there ain't *two* Martin Leffleys?"

"Let's hope not. One's enough. Why?"

"It says here he's made a speech."

"Sort of thing he would do. Young Martin must have been born talkin'."

"But this here speech of his is *printed!*" pursued Peacock in excited tones. "All about what he'd do

different to everybody else if he had his way! Nearly half a column of it! That's why he had the dam cheek to pass us last night without stoppin' to offer me a drink!"

Mrs. Peacock came and looked over his shoulder. Unlike Peacock, she was not impressed by seeing her nephew's name in print. She merely wanted to satisfy herself of the curious fact that anything he had said should have been considered of sufficient importance to be reported in a newspaper. Her opinion of Martin was a low one. In her estimation he was something of a pious fraud.

"That's Martin, right enough," she said disparagingly. "I'll run round directly and see what's the meaning of it all."

She had the truculent look of one who meant to "stand no nonsense" when she went out carrying the *Sentinel* folded tightly like a baton. Rose was surprised to see her so early in the day.

"So Martin's got into the papers," was her opening remark. The sound of it seemed to imply he had got into trouble.

Rose looked blank. Mrs. Peacock opened the paper and pointed out the column.

"Didn't you know?" she asked. "No? Then read it."

Rose took the paper. When she saw Martin's name she was first agitated, then awed, and finally overcome with pride. And he had told her nothing about having made a speech! How like his modesty! She was not at all surprised at his ability to make a speech. He was so clever, studying all sorts of things about politics. To see his dear name in the paper and to read his very

own words was nothing less than rapturous. Every phrase he had used seemed to her the very pearls of wisdom.

"How wonderful of him!" she exclaimed.

"Wonderful?" snapped Aunt Polly. "If you ask me, he's getting too big for his boots. Speechmaking at his age! What next? And a dirty Radical too!"

A flood of indignant color came into Rose's cheeks.

"I don't think you understand my Martin," she said with considerable asperity. "And I don't think you like him either."

"It's because I understand him that I don't like him. I tell you what, my girl; if Martin isn't properly sat on he'll grow into a nuisance. It's not so much the speechmakin' I object to, though all the same he's a regular windbag. Somebody's got to make speeches, I daresay, but who's he to set himself up to teach people?"

Often as Mrs. Peacock had shown herself inimical to Martin, Rose had never known her so bitter in her denunciation of him. It nettled her.

"I'm Martin's wife," she reminded the angry old woman.

"More's the pity for you."

"But why shouldn't he get on? And why are you so set against him? You're his own aunt. You ought to be doing your best to help him instead of standing in his way. His speech shows how clever he is. I'm proud of him for making it. There's not a word in it, either, about teaching people; but it shows plain enough that it's sensible men like him who are wanted to represent them."

Even this temperate argument—one which Rose would

not have been capable of expressing except under the influence of strong feeling—did nothing to allay Mrs. Peacock's irritation.

"Him represent people!" she scoffed. "He'd never represent anybody or anything except himself!"

"I can't think why you're so angry with him."

"Well, I'll tell you. And you can tell your precious husband. Last night in the street he was too stuck up to take any notice of me and Peacock. We passed him close as I am to you. Peacock fell off the curb with the shock, though I daresay he might have done that anyway. Martin saw us right enough. But because he was with Mr. Liversidge he went on with his nose in the air, much as to say we wasn't good enough to share the pavement with him. That's what riles me. Ashamed of his own relations! Silly of him too. I visits the Liversidges myself."

It was a distinct grievance. Rose had to admit it to herself. Although Martin had not told her about his speech, he had mentioned having walked part of the way home with Mr. Liversidge. The circumstance had duly impressed her. Now its importance was very much discounted by Mrs. Peacock's assertion that she, too, was on visiting terms with the Liversidge family. Rose could hardly credit it.

"Do you?" she asked in surprise.

"On business. I buy their cast-offs. Next time I go there I'll let them know I'm Martin's aunt. P'raps it'll take him down a peg or two."

"Oh, please don't," Rose begged. "I'm sure he couldn't have seen you last night. I'll tell him, and he'll come round and explain."

"Oh, yes, he's good at explaining," was the unmol-

lified rejoinder. "But he needn't put himself out to come round. What you *can* tell him, though, is that it's a mistake to put on swank. And there's another thing you can tell him: there's more money in the second-hand trade than meets the eye, but"—Mrs. Peacock paused long enough to let the words sink in—"it won't come his way."

XI

REPORTED IN FULL

MARTIN'S silence about his speech was not due to any modest reticence, but because he had a small opinion of Rose's intelligence. She lauded everything he did, often without reason, and he was getting tired of what he considered her uncritical praise. It was a self-complacent attitude and it made him underestimate her. That she was not without a certain clear-headed sagacity was a discovery he was not to make until later on.

Moreover, he had no expectation of seeing his speech in print. Remarks made by members of the audience were seldom recorded in the *Sentinel*. Last night, while under the glamor of excitement, and animated by Liveridge's affability, he had possibly overrated his oratorical effort. Now, in the cold light of morning, he was not so sure about it. He was, accordingly, all the more surprised when, on getting to his office, he opened the paper and made the gratifying discovery that he was reported in full. His step was very jaunty when he came in to dinner with the paper under his arm.

"I've seen it," Rose said, in rather a lifeless tone, when he laid it before her. "Aunt Polly brought it round."

"You look annoyed. Has it anything to do with my speech?"

"In a way, yes. I wish you'd told me about it yourself. I felt so silly not knowing what my own husband was doing."

"Do you mean that Aunt Polly was rude about it? I don't see why she should be. It isn't everybody who'd be reported first time he spoke."

"She seemed to think you'd no call to go making speeches," said Rose, still seething with resentment against Mrs. Peacock and unconsciously venting it on Martin.

"Don't say 'no call,' " he frowned.

The correction recalled Mrs. Peacock's charge against him of wanting to "teach people."

"I can only speak as I've learnt," she said a little crossly. "But it wasn't your speech that upset her so much as taking no notice of her and Mr. Peacock when you met them with Mr. Liversidge. Didn't you see them?"

"Oh, that's it, is it? Of course I saw them. They took care I should. She was half-dragging that drunken brute along, and he was singing at the top of his voice. I did what any self-respecting man would do: I cut them. I wasn't going to be shamed more than I could help before Mr. Liversidge. What else did she say?"

"She said lots. And she ended up by saying that I was to tell you there was more money than meets the eye in her trade, and that it wouldn't come your way."

A thoughtful look came into Martin's face.

"I've often fancied the old woman is better off than she pretends to be," he said. "I don't want to offend her. . . ." He relapsed into reflective silence.

Now that Rose had heard his version of the unpleasant incident she sided with him for ignoring his aunt and

her husband. All her ill-humor disappeared. That she should have vented it on Martin surprised her. The psychology of complex emotions and their effects were too elusive for her simple mind. What filled it now was contrition. Martin had distinguished himself, said nothing about it, and in a manner of speaking turned the other cheek to Aunt Polly. She crossed the room and put her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Martin, how wonderful you are!" she said. "I've been horrid. It was a beautiful speech. It's made me ever so proud of you, dear, and I haven't given you a single word of praise. Oh, I do love you!" She kissed him strenuously.

That night when Martin had settled down to his reading she sat with her mending-basket on her knees, stitching and watching him. She was in her customary adoring frame of mind. She loved these silent hours. They permitted her to revel unobserved in a close scrutiny of her beloved. Everything about him was perfect in her eyes. His unathletic figure had all the strength and grace of virile manhood. She was blind to the hardness of his mouth and the calculating expression of his eyes. She even thought his thick stubbly hair beautiful. The tinge of dull red in it shone in the lamplight. At these times, Rose, full of sentiment, always pictured herself in the years to come sitting at his feet with a heart full of love for a white-haired Martin. He was her very own husband. A gentle rapture pervaded her whenever she told herself that.

As the clock on the mantelpiece struck nine Martin got up and put his books away. As a rule, he read

for another half-hour. Its non-observance on this occasion made her give him an inquiring look.

"I'll just go round and see Aunt Polly," he said. "I daresay it's rather dull for her being alone in the evening. Peacock's always at 'The Feathers' or some other low drinking house. I'd go and cheer her up oftener if she'd keep her tongue more under control."

"You *are* an unselfish darling!" Rose exclaimed. She followed him out into the hall to help him on with his coat. As she kissed him good-by she added mentally: "I told her she didn't understand my Martin."

XII

MARTIN GETS A LESSON IN VALUES

THOUGH the shutters were up, the gas was full on inside the shop. Amidst the chaos of old boots and clothes and deplorable-looking furniture Mrs. Peacock was busy over a packing-case. It contained odds and ends which she had bought at auction a few days previously.

When Martin knocked at the door she left these things exposed while she went to open it. Although his visit was unexpected—never before had he turned up at this time of night—she showed no surprise. All the same, she thought she could hazard a fairly accurate guess at his reason for coming, assuming that Rose had repeated her closing remark of the morning.

“Well, you are in a hurry, I must say,” she remarked equably. “I haven’t made my will yet.”

Martin’s look of pained surprise availed him nothing. She was too full of guile herself to be deceived by it. And Martin she could read like a book.

“Your will?” he echoed. “I’m sorry you should imagine anything of the sort was in my mind. I’ve come round to explain about last night.”

“Explain away.” A resigned look came into Mrs. Peacock’s face. She sat down on the nearest bundle and folded her arms. “You can make speeches at public meetings and fill folks up with long words; but

no amount of that sort of soft sawder will make me believe you didn't see me and Peacock when you were walking along of Mr. Liversidge. Peacock wasn't a credit to me just then, I daresay; but that's no reason why you shouldn't have given your respectable aunt a hand home with her unfortunate husband."

Martin had come prepared to assert entire unconsciousness of having seen either his "respectable aunt" or her "unfortunate husband." With anybody else he would have made such a denial unblushingly and probably convincingly. But after the uncompromising way in which his aunt had tackled him, he saw the futility of subterfuge. The only thing to do under the circumstances, he decided, was to speak the truth and trust that she would believe it.

"I'm very sorry, Aunt Polly," he said. "I *did* see you both. I was so ashamed of Peacock's state that I simply didn't know which way to look."

"Oh, you weren't in any doubt where to look. You looked the other way. It strikes me you're the sort that if you'd lived in the New Testament you'd have been like Bible Peter and denied the Lord three times. Only you wouldn't have wept about it when the cock crew. Not you!"

The simile was too candid—and to Martin's mind too blasphemous—to take notice of.

"I'm really sorry," he repeated.

Aunt Polly let it go at that. She had extracted an apology, and although she did not altogether believe in its genuineness she was sufficiently mollified to refrain from further contesting the unpleasant incident. A short pause, in the nature of an armistice, ensued.

"So you're playing up to old Liversidge," she remarked presently.

"Not at all," he objected. "He went out of his way to speak to me, and invited me to walk part of the way with him."

"That's odd. . Wonder what for?"

Martin ignored the unflattering problem. Casting about for a subject of conversation that would not result in unsatisfactory argument, his eyes fell on the objects that Mrs. Peacock had been unpacking. They consisted of a pair of ormolu candlesticks, one broken; two blue-and-white Nankin ginger-jars; a Sheffield plate tray and snuffers; some mezzotints and a color-print. Of none of these subjects had he any knowledge.

"You don't generally deal in things of that sort, do you?" he asked.

The shrewd look she gave him was plainly meant to discover whether he knew anything about antiquities.

"Like them?" she asked in return.

"Can't say I do. Too old and dirty for me. That candlestick could do with a good brass polishing."

Mrs. Peacock gave a supercilious grunt.

"That's ormerloo, that is," she asserted, "and worth fifty shillings by itself, not counting the broken one."

"You're joking!"

"All right; think so if you like. But fifty shillings is what any dealer would be willing to give me for it."

Martin looked more closely at the candlestick. Under the dirt that coated it the highly-finished chasing would have been observable to the trained eye. He could find nothing to admire in it.

"What's ormerloo?" he inquired.

"A French word, meaning gilt."

He was still unimpressed.

"Mean to say you don't know anything about antiques?" Aunt Polly demanded.

"Can't say I do."

"Or old Nankin? Or old prints?" She indicated them. "Well, I didn't think there was anybody with any gumption who didn't, nowadays. And you a reader of books!"

He picked up a ginger-jar.

"What's this worth, then?"

"Three pounds is my price for it."

"But surely you didn't give anything like that for it?"

"What I gave for it is my business." Mrs. Peacock's mouth shut with a snap.

The values mentioned were arousing Martin's interest.

"But who buys them?" he asked.

"People who know good things when they see 'em. Mr. Liversidge among the rest."

"Oh, really?" Mrs. Peacock could not have mentioned a name more likely to stir him to a proper appreciation of antiques. He did a quick mental sum in proportion. If it was good enough for Liversidge to invest in such things it would be well worth his own while to do the same. His aunt watched the speculative expression in his face. She thought the opportunity a good one for increasing her prestige. Martin must be made to see that other people had their importance as well as himself.

"I s'pose you thought I got my living by dealing in old clothes?" she sniffed.

"Don't you?" he queried.

"Oh, I deal in old clothes right enough. They pay

the rent of the shop and keep Peacock in drinks. But it's the antiques that bring the real money in."

"Have you always dealt in them?"

"A good few years. I daresay I could retire on what I've made out of them, if I cared to."

He was thunderstruck. He understood now why she had given him the impression of being a woman of means. Her independent manner was accounted for by the possession of money. . . . And then came the thought, cold and depressing, of what she had said to Rose: her money wouldn't come *his* way. He gave her a furtive glance, trying to estimate her age. She might be fifty-five; perhaps sixty-two or three. . . .

He stayed a few minutes longer talking casually of one thing and another. Then he said good-night and went out.

But in the dark of the street he stared at the shuttered shop, hating her.

XIII

AND ANOTHER LESSON IN POLICY

THE three years during which the Leffleys lived in Routh Villas saw great changes in Martin's fortunes. In the first place, "Rosalia," now floated as a limited company, was earning big dividends. Martin's holding in it brought him in £200 a year. He was also a junior partner in Grimwood Brothers. His share of the business came to no more than he had received before his promotion, but the change was all to the good. It took him out of the ranks of the employed into those of the employers.

These better times brought about a noticeable improvement in the appearance of the young couple. Martin now wore good clothes. In the old days he had been obliged to content himself with ready-made suits and to trust to time to adapt them to his figure. Latterly he had been able to go to a tailor who made to measure. The day came when he went to chapel in a frock coat and a silk hat, the outward signs of worldly progress and spiritual soundness.

Rose, too, reflected the family prosperity by discarding the apron she had been in the habit of wearing all day long. Now she came down to breakfast in a neat blouse and skirt, and afterwards did a little leisurely dusting in the front room—renamed the drawing-room. She only went into the kitchen to superintend

or to concoct some special dish for Martin's dinner. She could wear her diamond engagement ring and another which Martin had since given her without incongruous effect. Sometimes she missed the old simplicity and unpretentiousness, but she did her best to live up to the new order of things. She had afternoon tea, and called upon her neighbors.

Socially, the Leffleys had made great strides. They were on friendly terms with the Liversidges, and had got to know the families of other well-to-do tradespeople. Martin and the prosperous chemist were particularly intimate. The latter had taken his young friend in hand and superintended his political education.

For Martin needed a political mentor. Like all those who rise from the ranks, or want to, his difficulty had been how to reconcile his contempt of the latter with his hatred of the upper classes. As one of the people he had no alternative but to begin by identifying himself politically with the people. But the bond irked him. He was convinced he had the brains of those on the higher plane, and he had no real sympathy with the masses. It was Liversidge, long past the inexperienced stage of political scrupulousness, who taught him the virtue of necessity, showed him how to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

He did it with considerable subtlety. At his instigation Mrs. Liversidge invited Mr. and Mrs. Leffley to dinner. Seven-thirty was the hour named, and Martin and Rose were immediately in a dilemma as to the proper clothes to wear. Would the Liversidges expect them to be in evening dress? It would be very trying if they made the mistake of appearing in the wrong things. Martin possessed a suit of dress clothes. He

had only worn it once at a public dinner. In the end he decided on going in his frock coat. Rose's dress, a blue silk summer one, turned down at the neck, was a compromise about which she had less misgivings.

Martin was accordingly very uncomfortable when he found Liversidge in a swallow-tail coat and a white tie. He saw he had made a social blunder. It took all his host's cordiality to put him at his ease. It seemed to him that the parlormaid eyed him disparagingly. Every time he looked at Liversidge he felt an unpleasant inferiority. It even put him at a moral disadvantage when, dinner finished and his hostess and Rose had retired, he was left alone with the master of the house.

With his political views still in flux, Martin had lately been expressing them publicly with some of the strenuous indefiniteness that had marked his first speech. Liversidge began by a little gentle reproof on what he called his indiscretion. He once more maintained that Martin was going too far.

"But what can I do?" Martin demanded. "I feel most strongly about class distinctions. The poor man hasn't a chance. Look at the public services. From top to bottom they're filled by the upper classes, irrespective of ability. Natural ability by itself hasn't a chance. The country's governed by well-bred nincompoops. I've been to the House and listened to the speeches there. Leaving out the Labor members, they're all delivered in a superior haw-haw tone. I'm told it's the Oxford manner. It makes me sick! It makes me want to fight its insolence. Why should there be a privileged class at all?"

"I know how you feel," Liversidge responded. "I

was the same once. But I've got over it. It don't help to let your feelings get the better of you. There's one thing you mustn't do if you want to get on: you mustn't get shirty with the upper classes or their way of talking. Anyhow, you mustn't show it. That's where they have the pull over people like us. They don't get excited and they hardly ever lose their temper."

"Well, what do you advise then?"

Liversidge drew at his cigar for a while.

"Of course it's a fight between us and them," he answered thoughtfully. "It always has been. There was Wat Tyler, and the Chartists, and the Stuart Revolution. The working-classes got their own back then, but it didn't last. The toffs always have the best of it in the end. And why? Because of the very thing that gets your back up so—the Oxford manner. Its only another name for confidence—the confidence of those that have the power. You may take it there's always been an 'Oxford manner' with the ruling classes. Moses had it, I daresay. How's it got? Education and exclusiveness."

Martin fidgeted in his chair. This was only a demonstration of an objectionable state of affairs, not advice. Liversidge saw his irritation and held up his hand, asking for patience.

"There's nothing like getting at the truth of things," he said. "Then you know how to deal with them. I could give you examples from my business. But let's stick to the point. Education and exclusiveness. Two great advantages. You agree, eh? Well, the first isn't beyond us and the other don't matter. Education's

coming, if it hasn't come already. It only wants disciplining."

Martin mumbled something about time.

"Yes, I know it's a question of time. Sort of evolution. You can't hurry a thing like that. If you do you spoil it. As for exclusiveness it doesn't count *that*"—Liversidge snapped his fingers contemptuously—"in face of money. There's an aristocracy of trade rising up with more exclusiveness in it—a more *powerful* exclusiveness—than what the nobility ever had. What's a duke with a paltry fifty thousand pounds a year compared with Cadbury or Lever with millions bringing them in from ten to twenty per cent.? Which of 'em's got the power? I tell you, the power's come to the big trader—to dry goods, to meat-extracts, to oil, as well as to bacon and soap. It's come to pills and emulsions and ointments; and soon it's coming to the retail chemist. He's only got to import largely himself at dumping prices instead of going to the home producer."

"But that isn't good political economy," ventured Martin. "It means money going out of the country."

"Then let it go, say I. Am I to refuse good German drugs because they're cheaper than home-made ones? If the English manufacturer won't or can't compete with Germany it's his own lookout. I should be a fool to be patriotic at the expense of my pocket!"

"I see that; but where do I come in?"

Liversidge bent forward and laid a finger impressively on Martin's knee.

"Hasn't it struck you that the commercial classes want men like yourself to represent them politically? Don't you see the opening for *lieutenants* of industry?

So far, labor's the only section properly organized—in Parliament."

The significance of the words were not lost on Martin. They meant that he might aspire to a seat in Parliament in the interests of a class controlling more wealth and power than any other in the country. They also hinted that Liversidge was a mouthpiece of that class.

"Yes, I see that," he stammered. "But—but"—the white expanse of Liversidge's shirtfront and his dress clothes almost destroyed his confidence—"how could I afford to think of Parliament? Of course, I feel competent enough—as competent, that is, as many other men who've got in," he went on, anxious not to cheapen himself. "In fact, I may say, getting into Parliament has always been in my mind. Still, it's a question of money, Mr. Liversidge."

"If the Trades Unions can pay their members so can we. Look here, Leffley, it's early yet to go into that. Think it over. You've got a lot to learn first, and to remember the interests you'd have to represent."

"I don't see that they'd be against my convictions," said Martin, easily convinced that they would not.

And then it was that Liversidge presented a political platform for his young friend.

"They'd be your own interests: the raising up of the masses; putting a check on the power of the nincompoops you were speaking of. Both results can be brought about without creating friction between labor and capital. That's what wants avoiding most—trade disputes. What comes of them? The curtailing of business and impoverishment of the working classes. Absolutely nothing else. Now I ask you, Leffley, what can a working man live on comfortably?"

"It never cost me more than seventeen-and-six a week."

"And few of the single ones get less than twenty-five shillings. What do they do with the difference? Spend it on beer and dissipation. As abstainers—you and I—ought we to countenance a minimum wage of thirty shillings a week when we know that over a third of it would go in drink?"

Martin shook his head in vigorous negation.

"Well, what I say is that the working man's got to be educated out of his wasteful and pernicious habits. Not in so many words, of course. If you take him to task about what he's always been used to he won't listen. You've got to manage him a cleverer way than that. You've got to bring it home to him that what stands in his way is the want of education; that it's education that gives the upper classes their hold over him—keeps him down, keeps him poor. You've got to preach a crusade in favor of the education of the masses. Not only Council-school teaching, but something as good as university education, and paid for out of the rates. You've got to make him see that it's only when he's on the same educational level as the man with 'the Oxford manner' that he'll be worth as many pounds as he is shillings at present."

Martin's sharp eyes rested for a moment incredulously on his well-fed, comfortable-looking host.

"Wouldn't it take generations to bring about that result?" he asked.

"Very likely," replied Liversidge, calmly sucking at his cigar. "But think how good it would be for trade in the meantime."

XIV

AND ASSIMILATES WHAT HE LEARNS FROM BOTH

NEITHER Martin nor Liversidge had any illusions about each other. A very little reflection satisfied the former that his wealthy friend's interest in the working classes was assumed the better to enable him to exploit them, nor was he at all shocked by this discovery. Its wiliness appealed to him. Like a piano string, the streak of craft in his own nature instantly vibrated to the artful note struck by Liversidge.

Clever in a way as Martin might be, he was no match for Liversidge. The chemist had made a study of using men and getting the most out of them at the least possible expense to himself. It was that gift of selection which, properly employed, benefits the chooser and the chosen alike, but which prostituted to business purposes drops to the level of sweating with all the profit to the sweater. What Liversidge paid for plate-glass windows and the mahogany fittings of his many shops he took out of his employees' wages. The more he economized in this way the more he spent on decoration and advertisement. He bought cheaply, principally in the German market, because he bought largely, and though he undersold his smaller competitors his profits were larger than theirs. There was no waste in Liversidge's system of trading.

He had long seen that Martin's abilities might be made of value to the commercial plutocracy to which he belonged. He had no intention of making his protégé's fortune, or anybody else's for that matter. It was only a question of getting work done at the least cost, in other words, of securing Martin at considerably less than he was worth. So he began by flattering his vanity and impressing him with the importance of the interests which it was proposed he should represent. All the while Martin lacked capital of his own, while he was unfamiliar with the principles of commercial exploitation, he would remain a profitable investment. When in time he discovered these things he could be dropped in favor of a cheaper man. That was only business.

In a dim way Martin saw all this. He took it for granted that Liversidge had no philanthropic views on his behalf. Deep down within him he entirely approved of playing on the credulity of the masses. He had the satisfaction of knowing that the offer made him was a tribute to his merits. Also, the position squared with his ambitions. Liversidge, he knew, was associated in business with a lot of "big" people, knighted Captains of Industry. He had, for instance, heard his name connected with that of Sir Alfred Gammel, the millionaire storekeeper. Another associate of his was Sir James Witt, the contractor, a man who had once been a dustman and who had risen to wealth out of the by-products of household refuse. There were others, soap and cocoa manufacturers, jam and sweetmeat makers, dyers and cleaners, sardine and soup canners—the purveyors of the countless commodities one sees advertised in all the newspapers and on every hoarding. To

be "in" with these people had a great fascination for Martin.

Of course he saw through the education dodge. At first it had rather staggered him. To cite the lack of education as an argument against strikes and the keeping down of wages was a height of casuistry to which, by himself, he would never have dared to aspire, even if he had had the boldness to devise it. He saw the feasibility of such a policy. Properly carried out it would have an air of great genuineness. That was what he liked most about it. He saw the value of "Education" as a crusade, with himself as its ostensible protagonist. It would put him on a higher political plane than the men who only preached the customary economics. It would give him an ethical advantage over them. He had often noticed that all the public men who were strong on education were respected. He rather suspected that a good many of them used education with that object. And it was such a cheap way of getting oneself thought well of. That was another reason why he took such a liking to it.

But the pedagogic strain in him had a good deal to do with the predilection. As Mrs. Peacock had often remarked, he gave people the impression that he was out to teach them. That was peculiarly annoying to those who did not want to be taught. Peacock, for instance, resented the tone of a succession of speeches which Martin made about this time. They all concerned education and its advantages. Peacock read them in the *Sentinel*. At least, after reading the first one he did no more than glance at the others—glance and sniff.

And when Martin made his next duty call, with an

eye to propitiating his aunt and to learn something more of the trade in antiques, Peacock rallied him on these speeches.

"What are you doin' it for?" he asked. "What's the good of education, anyway?"

Martin said he was trying to be helpful to the masses, and explained some of the advantages of knowledge, but without convincing Peacock in the least.

"There's money in it, I s'pose?"

Martin shook his head.

"Don't understand it. Far as I can see, it don't do you no good, nor anybody else. It's not as if you was one of those professor chaps paid to jaw about dictionaries and what not. You're in the temperance drink trade. Why don't you stick to it?"

Here Aunt Polly joined in: "I can't think where you get it from, Martin. Readin' and writin' was good enough for your father and mother, same as it is for Peacock and me. Them Board schools, where you was brought up, has a deal to answer for, teachin' boys Latin and Science, and girls the pianner. But that ain't enough, accordin' to you. Everybody's got to leave off earnin' their livin' and stuff 'emselves full of book-knowledge. Seems to me trade'd be at a standstill if you had your way."

Martin found it difficult to explain his motives. To talk altruism to the Peacocks would have been useless. They wouldn't have believed him. He saw they were suspicious, wondering, if he got nothing out of it, what his object could be.

"They say charity begins at home," Aunt Polly remarked. "Same with education, I s'pose. Are you goin' to have a governess for Rose?"

"It's the younger generation I'm thinking of," he rejoined.

"That's a blessing," mumbled Peacock. "Makes you glad you're gettin' on in life."

"You're seein' a good deal of the Liversidges just now, I hear," said Aunt Polly inconsequently.

"We go there sometimes," Martin admitted.

"Was it him as put you on to this education stunt?" inquired Peacock.

"Well, he's naturally interested in the subject. Of course, every one who has the welfare of the people at heart must be."

Peacock snorted. "I know all about Liversidge. All the welfare he has at 'art he wants for himself. A teetotaler like him don't do things without hopin' to make something out of it. F'rinstance, it's a hundred to one he sells you the chemicals for that strikern, ne drink of yours. As for this here education it's all talk. Talkin' makes me thirsty."

He got up, making noises with his tongue, and presently passed into the shop. A moment later he returned and said to his wife:

"That chap what has the walnut chest says he'll take three pounds for it. I told him to bring it round." Then he disappeared for good, presumably in the direction of "The Feathers."

To be discredited by his own relations was no new experience to Martin. He had almost anticipated that he would be, so he consoled himself for Peacock's rudeness by remembering how seldom a man can expect to be a prophet in his own country. So far, his good faith on the educational question had not been impugned in any other quarter. The Peacocks, after all, did not

constitute his world; he was even inclined to think he had overestimated his aunt's knowledge of the antique business. She had gone into the shop, and Martin, watching from the doorway, found it difficult to believe that its piles of débris could represent anything of value. Still, there was the old woman's cryptic insinuation about the money she would leave behind her. How was that to be explained?

Just then a man drew up a handcart at the open door. On it was a carved wooden chest. It was grimed with dirt and age; one of its lower corners was broken off. To Martin it looked mere lumber. He would not have put it in Jane's bedroom.

When the man, after much exertion, had brought it into the shop and been paid for it, Aunt Polly stood over it, rubbing her hands complacently.

"Ever heard of Genevra, Martin?" she asked.

"No, why?"

"Young woman who hid in a chest on her weddin' day, and never was seen no more. Saved her some trouble with husbands, I reckon. Might have been a chest like this one, too."

"Three pounds seems a lot to give for it," ventured Martin.

"I wouldn't have give three pounds if I could have got it for less," said Aunt Polly, with a smile so subtle that Martin could not help pondering on it when he went away.

That week he happened to be in the West End where something in a shop window attracted his attention. Among a number of antiquities of evident value was Aunt Polly's chest. He couldn't be mistaken about it. Certain peculiarities of the carving were fresh in his

memory, and the broken lower corner was there as well. After a little hesitation he went in and inquired the price.

It was thirty guineas!

XV

BOTH FEET ON THE LADDER

WITH a discreet nudge Liversidge directed the attention of the man next to him to the speaker who had just risen. It was Martin. Besides these three, there were a dozen others on the platform.

The air of the hall was close. Among its audience of several hundreds, working men predominated. The meeting had been convened ostensibly to protest against certain Government measures. In reality it was but one of several gatherings which the Liversidge party had been recently inaugurating with the object of furthering their covert war against the wage-earner.

The chemist's companion watched Martin intently. He had come for that purpose. He was middle-aged, of prosperous appearance, and he gave the impression of being a successful business man; which he was.

As a public speaker Martin by this time had greatly improved. He had an easy delivery and he was free from the irritating habit of repetition. Nobody could have guessed that every word he uttered had been carefully committed to memory beforehand. Always able to learn anything by heart quickly he now relied entirely on his memory. It was a gift that permitted him a choice of expression and a consecutiveness of argument that not only suggested eloquence above the average, but gave many a platitude the value of origi-

nality. In consequence, many people spoke of his oratorical abilities and some thought him scholarly.

Now as always his theme was the social defenselessness of the working classes. It gave him the sympathy of his audience from the outset. A carefully calculated note of compassion was in his voice as he dealt with the conditions of labor, suppressed feeling in every illustration that he gave to prove the disabilities by which the toiler is surrounded. To the mind of all present his tone and manner left no doubt that his championship of the poor and oppressed was a heartfelt one. To point his arguments he relied on bathos and Biblical metaphor whenever he could. It was when he came to speak of the distress caused by constant friction between employers and employed that his scriptural parallels came most into play. He had to thank the many years of close and constant attendance at chapel for the effect these gave to his words. They provided him with endless touching similes that went straight to the emotions of an unsophisticated audience, and often discounted the criticism of a more enlightened one. Martin had early gauged the value of such appeals. In an unctuous reference to the sorrows of "the women and the little children" and the effect of pious beneficence which they created he had no superiors on a public platform.

That was the point at which he always went on to discountenance economic strife. He did so now. He drew a subtle distinction between those who exploit labor in order to create what he called waste-wealth, and those who employ it legitimately in commercial enterprise. The text was Liversidge's but the sermon was his own. In the one case, the profits, he maintained, were locked up or only partially spent for the self-gratifica-

tion of the few; in the other, a continual reinvestment was occurring so that the major portion of it came back to the people. The former section were the enemies of labor; the latter its benefactors. It was also a mistake to be antagonistic to such large employers of labor as railway companies and mine-owners. It was obvious from the small dividends derived from such concerns that they paid a fair wage. Even the land-owner was a much-maligned person, and for the same reason. The waste of wealth did not lie with any of these; it lay with a system by which the people's money, the accumulated funds of the country, were controlled by a select few who took care to keep it in their own hands. These were the parasites that fed on the blood and bone of the working classes—the countless overpaid bureaucrats who swarmed in the public offices and were the recipients of endowments under a State church. All these posts were sinecures, deliberately created for the support of the younger sons of the aristocracy. But that was not all. Free state-insurance, denied to the masses, had for centuries been provided for their betters in the guise of national armaments and pensions. The Army and the Navy were nothing else than a Tom Tiddler's ground for the idle rich. The people paid millions for these two services—services which had been instituted solely to provide lucrative posts for men who were incapable of earning their bread by honest toil.

A hearty roll of applause gave Martin time to mentally con his next point. So far, what he had said was the usual claptrap subtlety twisted to distract attention from the methods of monopolists like Liversidge. It meant that Martin had been properly disciplined.

And what qualification was required of this legion

of bloodsuckers! he demanded. One only—education; the advantage of a training at public schools and universities from which the masses were carefully excluded. What working or middle-class man had a chance of getting his son into Eton or Harrow or Rugby? He could not afford the heavy fees demanded at any of them. For the same reason, Oxford and Cambridge were barred to him. And if a man had not passed through this particular apprenticeship he could hardly hope to get into the Government service, the law, or the Church, or rise to a commission in the Army or Navy, or be employed in any lucrative capacity under the State, no matter what his merits might be. It amounted to legalized monopoly.

That was what the people ought to fight against; not against the manufacturers and the traders, but the system of privilege that kept them uneducated.

“You think yourselves well enough off with your Council and Technical schools,” he proceeded. “But you’re not. The State only pays for the upkeep of these institutions to excuse itself from admitting you into its colleges and universities. And until you break down the barriers that keep you out of them, until you stand on an educational equality with the privileged classes, you cannot hope to better yourselves. Don’t listen to people who tell you it can’t be done. It’s been done in isolated instances. There are men who by sheer determination have augmented by private study the knowledge they acquired at Council schools, and so won open scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge. And what one can do all can do. But apart from individual effort, what is needed is that the state should give the working-

man's son the same instruction as it does to the son of a duke."

Here the applause was rapturous. When it subsided he was ready with his peroration.

"Education is power. I see a time when education will be no man's privilege; when no man will feel inferior for the want of it; when every man with ability will be in a position to demand what is due to his special qualifications. We talk of government by the people. At present it is only talk. But when the people, by virtue of general and equal education, are capable, as they will be, of governing as well as being governed, then social distinctions will disappear, and with them every atom of the friction that to-day is wasting the energies of the two pillars of the social system—labor and the employers of labor."

Cheers and clapping went on for half a minute after he had resumed his seat. His platitudes and half-truths had clearly been appreciated. He felt very satisfied with himself. Another speaker got up and began stammering banalities.

"Well, what do you think of him?" Liversidge whispered to the properous-looking man.

"He'll do," was the reply. "Were those views his own?"

Liversidge grinned. "Not always. They are now, though. I've schooled him."

"I see. We'll have a talk with him afterwards."

A little later a resolution was put and carried, and the proceedings terminated. Liversidge beckoned to Martin.

"Very good speech," he said. "Sir Alfred thinks so

too. I'll introduce you to him," he added in the tone of one about to confer a favor.

The patient way in which he waited while Sir Alfred bade good-night to several leading lights on the platform helped to make Martin sensible of the honor awaiting him.

"Big pot, Sir Alfred Gammel," said Liversidge behind his hand. "Shouldn't wonder if he's worth a couple of millions."

The "big pot" turned.

"Allow me to introduce Mr. Leffley to you, Sir Alfred."

Martin bowed diffidently.

"How d'do."

The greeting sounded to Martin rather grudging. His fingers had been ready for a handshake which was not forthcoming. Sir Alfred's eyes had rested on him a bare instant. He felt quite uncomfortable when the millionaire, without a pause, addressed Liversidge.

"We may as well be going."

"Very good, Sir Alfred." A sudden thought seemed to strike Liversidge. "Do you mind my bringing Mr. Leffley?"

Sir Alfred's nod was an indifferent affirmative.

"Come on," Liversidge signaled rather than said over his shoulder as he followed the big man out.

A brougham, whose dull body and unpolished brass-work was in keeping with the slovenly-looking coachman in charge of it, stood at the entrance of the hall. Martin, unacquainted with the attitude of the servant who knows himself to be as good as his master, was surprised that the man did not touch his hat when Sir Alfred got in and, with Liversidge, took the back seat.

Martin was left to make himself as comfortable as he could on the narrow one facing them. It was too dark for him to see Sir Alfred's face distinctly, yet he was conscious of being steadily looked at. The brougham had been in movement a few minutes when a question was shot at him abruptly.

"Do you always speak without notes?"

"Generally," said Martin.

"H'm, you must have a good memory."

After that there was silence. The effect of the taciturn knight on Martin was one of repulsion. It seemed to him that his manner was unduly guarded, not to say suspicious. Never having previously been brought into contact with a millionaire of the industrial world he did not know how nearly correct this view was; nor that men of the stamp of Sir Alfred Gammel, whose whole life is spent in getting the better of the community at large, are intensely and characteristically distrustful of strangers.

Being about to make Martin a certain proposition the two business-men deliberately meant to reduce him to a malleable state of mind first. He was to be made to recognize his own inferiority and be grateful for any patronage. The days of practical enslavement being past, the modern commercial Legree employs moral discipline to reduce his victim to the proper degree of subservience. Hence Sir Alfred's offensive manner. Liveridge's part was that of the jackal.

Accordingly, on their arrival at the latter's house they did not at once broach what they had brought Martin there to hear. For half an hour he had to sit and listen to matters that did not at all concern him—industrial and financial ventures in which it was ap-

parent that Sir Alfred and Liversidge were jointly interested. "Gammel's, Limited," huge stores, where you might buy anything that the world produced, was the main topic; but things relating to the drug trade appeared to be equally familiar to the head of that concern.

Martin found his thoughts straying in these unfamiliar fields. It was past his usual bed-time and he was a little sleepy. It was with something of a start, therefore, that he sat up on being suddenly addressed by Sir Alfred.

"How would you like to represent Hemford in Parliament, Mr. Leffley?"

Luckily for Martin his habitually impassive face hardly indicated anything of the delighted surprise which the question aroused in him. Now he knew why Sir Alfred had come down to hear him speak and why the present meeting had been arranged. Liversidge's propaganda—the long process of familiarizing Martin with the prospect of a seat in Parliament—was going to materialize. The thing had been planned in advance, in anticipation of an electoral vacancy. Sir Alfred's mention of Hemford made it clear that one was about to occur there.

Never so much as now had Martin needed all the commercial instinct of which he was possessed. Intuition told him that he would have to bargain. He had done it successfully with the Grimwoods over the "Rosalia" transaction. He must be equally firm now.

"Mr. Liversidge and I have had several talks about my standing for Parliament, Sir Alfred," he replied. "He knows my views. The whole question is one of money."

"I should have thought political advancement would have most weight with a young man like you."

"I am quite sensible of what that means, but I can't afford to give up everything else for it."

"We don't want you to," Liversidge put in. "I've suggested to Sir Alfred that we pay you two hundred a year if you're returned. I think that's a generous offer."

"It might be to a single man. You must remember I'm married."

"Any family?" inquired Sir Alfred.

"Not at present. Of course there may be. There probably will be," Martin added hurriedly, regretting the absence of such an asset as a means to increase his terms. "Is the vacancy at Hemford officially announced?"

"No, it's not generally known there will be one. In fact, the sitting member hasn't thought of retiring yet."

Martin naturally showed surprise. He couldn't understand the offer of a seat which the present occupant had not thought of relinquishing.

"That'll be all right," Liversidge assured him. "In strict confidence we don't mind telling you that we—or, rather, Sir Alfred, owing to his big interests in Hemford, controls the party organization there. The present member is to all intents and purposes his nominee."

"As you would be," observed Sir Alfred dryly.

Martin had expected as much. He nodded acquiescence.

"But," Sir Alfred continued, "of course if you don't feel inclined to accept two hundred——"

"I don't," was Martin's quick but quiet interruption.

He sat staring at the ceiling with apparent uncon-

cern, but his heart thumped with anxiety lest the two men should see that he was bluffing. The moments dragged.

"How much do you want?" snapped Sir Alfred.

"What I'm worth. Without vanity, I think I'm worth four hundred a year—in your interests, Sir Alfred."

Sir Alfred shook his head, but Martin pretended not to see the gesture.

"Twice what a Labor member gets!" Liversidge exclaimed.

"I put my value at more than twice that of a Labor member," said Martin.

There was a pause. Martin's unexpected firmness was having the usual effect. The more he stood out the more his value increased in the estimation of the two business-men. Besides, they really wanted him.

"Look here, Mr. Leffley," said Sir Alfred at last, "I'll be quite frank. We think well of you, and we'd like to have you with us. But you're a speculation. Another thing, you're very young for Parliament."

"Did you think that when I was speaking to-night?" asked Martin.

"I'll go to three hundred," was the indirect reply. "Will you accept?"

Although asking more, three hundred was the amount Martin had meant to stand out for. He would have to give up his salary at Grimwoods', but with what he got out of "Rosalia" he would have in all over five hundred a year. A very comfortable feeling was in the thought. He appeared to give Sir Alfred's offer a moment or two of careful consideration.

"If that's exclusive of my election expenses—private ones, such as hotel bills——"

"We'll find those."

"Very well, I accept," said Martin; and his tone was that of a man making a considerable concession.

"We shall of course expect you to have no political views of your own. We pay for the goods. It's for you to deliver them. Is that quite understood?"

"Quite."

"I mention it because the present member isn't doing all he should in our interests—our *special* interests. We can't afford to support any one under those conditions. In fact we make a point of putting an immediate stop to disloyalty. That's plain, I hope?"

It was not only plain, but plainly a threat, and Martin knew it. He would have to do as he was told. He had no quarrel with control of that kind, and he said so.

"When do you expect the election to take place?" he asked.

"Not for some months. The usual time will have to elapse to allow for resignation and the adoption of a new candidate. All that's a mere matter of form. But we shall want you to go down to Hemford to work up the constituency during the next few weeks. So hold yourself in readiness."

"I shall be ready as soon as I have a letter from you embodying the terms we've just agreed on."

"A letter?" Sir Alfred looked disturbed. "It isn't usual."

"I think it's necessary," said Martin. "Without it I can't see my way to give up the assured position I hold at present."

"Oh, very well," was the grudging rejoinder.

Liversidge said something in an undertone. All Martin caught of it were the words, "pretty woman." Sir Alfred got up.

"That's settled then," he said. "Liversidge will see to everything. By the way, Leffley, the domestic touch is often valuable in politics. You might take your wife down to Hemford when you go. Good-night. Best wishes."

Liversidge went to the street door with Martin. When he came back he noticed that Sir Alfred's face wore a moody look.

"Liversidge," said the millionaire, "I'm inclined to think that young man's abilities are wasted on politics. He ought to have been in business."

XVI

ROSE ASKS A QUESTION

RIGHT up to the street-door, with Liversidge able to watch his face, Martin contrived to hide his feelings. Once outside in the dark he gave them full vent. They effervesced with excitement at his good fortune and the terms he had extracted from Gammel. At one stride he had jumped halfway up the ladder of his ambitions. He didn't care whether he got in for Hemford or not. Considering what he had been told of Sir Alfred's influence there he probably would; but if not it would not matter. The fact that he would shortly be fighting the constituency was enough for the moment. It would give him a place in practical politics. It would be in every newspaper in the kingdom. After that, even if the election went against him, he instinctively felt that it would only be a question of time before he had a seat in Parliament.

But, curiously enough, that was not his dominant thought. Success stimulated his mind, giving it a sense of enlarged powers. He was brimful of confidence. He felt capable of surmounting the biggest obstacles of life that might come in his way. He strode the pavement like a conqueror. And the reason was Rose. That furtive phrase of Liversidge's, "pretty woman," must have referred to her. Sir Alfred's suggestion concerning her confirmed it. The former had extolled

her good looks; the latter had probably speculated about them! The effect on Martin was one of sexual exaltation. He had never felt like that about Rose before. Sometimes, when he had watched a pretty girl in the street, something of the sort had affected him, but not to the same degree. This was a new and much profounder sensation.

She was sitting up for him when he got in. She saw the change in him, the exaltation, and put it down to oratorical achievement at the meeting.

"You made a splendid speech, dear," she cried. "I can see it in your face! Do tell me all about it."

And Martin told her. Of the speech he made light. He knew it was no better and no worse than many others he had made. He went straight to his interview with Gammel and its outcome. That, as he told her, spelt success—Success with a giant capital.

"I told you I was going to get on, Rose!" he said, reaching for her hand. "This is half the battle. You'll help me to win it, won't you, my wife?"

Martin was unconscious of the theatricalism of the sentence and the action accompanying it. He was fast forming the habit of playing to the gallery, even in private life. The more he did it the easier it became to deceive himself into believing in his own sincerity. Rose was blind to both faults. She held his hand tight as she answered emotionally:

"You know I don't live for anything else."

He drew her on to his knee and looked at her more intently than he had done for years. Yes, she *was* pretty, much prettier than he had ever imagined. That another man should have been the cause of his making the discovery did not disconcert him in the least. It

even increased his respect for Liversidge's powers of observation. He would have felt just the same if Liversidge had pointed out the beauties of some inanimate possession of his, a picture or a sofa. Indeed it was the pride of possession that brought him most gratification. It flattered his choice of a wife. It did not occur to him that he might have appreciated her good looks more in the past. He did not blame himself for neglecting her, although he knew he had done so lately. He never condemned himself on moral grounds. Besides, he could make up for it, now that his good fortune was assured. The desire to do so was strong in him—that new desire which had come into being while he was walking home.

He must have shown something of the sort, for Rose, looking at him, felt an emotion that was almost bride-like. She laid her cheek against his in soft rapture.

"I do thank God for you," she murmured. "There wouldn't be any unfaithful wives if they all had Martins."

"I'm glad you're contented with me. It's good to be appreciated. It spurs me on." Not for long could Martin forget the material side of things.

"How?"

"To further efforts. Making more money, and so on."

Rose sighed ever so faintly.

"I suppose women look at things differently to men. I don't want anything better than I've got. Aren't you afraid of thinking too much about money, Martin—in case it took our happiness away?"

"One can't have too much. The more money one

has the happier one can be. You'll understand that in time."

"I don't know." Rose shook her head doubtfully. "Sometimes I ask myself what it's all for. Don't think I'm discontented. I couldn't be with you. Only, sometimes, when I see you working so hard and looking tired, I wonder whether it's worth it. It isn't as if you were doing it for somebody."

She was wrong there. All Martin's efforts were wholeheartedly incurred on behalf of somebody of supreme importance—himself, to wit.

"I don't think I understand," he said tolerantly, as though desirous of getting her point of view. It was the tolerance he had acquired by listening with apparent interest to the question of a heckler while he was speech-making. "A man must do something. He can't stop still. If he doesn't go forwards and make a way it shows he has no ambition or no ability. If every one were contented with what they had there would never have been any successful men—no Cæsars or Napoleons, or people like Cadbury or Northcliffe or Gammel. It's my belief that, at the beginning, Cæsar and Napoleon weren't thinking of making history. It was their private, personal ambitions that made it for them. Power is the thing to aim at. If a man has ambition and knows how to make money he'll get power."

"I expect you're right. I can't argue cleverly like you do. It isn't that I don't like money. I'd gladly have more than I want, so as to be able to spend it on making soup for poor people and helping to dress ragged children. What I meant was that to make money for somebody else seems more—what one ought to do."

"Well, I want to make it for you."

"I know, dear. But I want such a little."

"Well—one makes it for one's children."

Subtle Rose! She had deliberately led him up to that admission.

"That's what I mean," she said. "But are we ever going to have any children?"

Since her illness they had never discussed that question. Martin had simply not concerned himself with it until Sir Alfred's inquiry had brought it into his mind again. Now, the trembling appeal in Rose's voice as she emphasized the millionaire's question gave it new force. He did not answer for a moment, and she asked it a second time, with more insistence, less shyly.

Of late, she had come to know herself. While she was ill and for some time afterwards the cause of it had made her sad and regretful. As her strength returned these feelings gathered intensity. She hungered to be a mother. At times the yearning was so strong that she had to shut herself in her room and grapple with it in solitude. It was her only personal desire, an unselfish one since it was the outcome of her love for Martin. Without knowing it, she was in the grip of the recreative impulse, the world-force which concerns itself with the continuation of the race and not at all with the transitory life of the individual. She wanted a child. Her nature demanded a child. She knew it to be her right, her heritage. She was a woman born for motherhood less than passion. Lacking motherhood, her whole system suffered.

"Martin," she went on urgently, "I must tell you what I feel. I can't keep it to myself. I daresay lots of women without children know what it is. Before I was married, whenever I saw another woman who

was going to have a baby, I used to feel sorry for her and wonder how she could possibly want to go through the pain that people say is so dreadful. I didn't understand it any more than I understood—marriage. But now everything's different. When I see a tiny baby I know there's nothing in the world I want so much or so badly. When I see a woman who is going to be a mother I long to know what it's like. It's just as much a mystery as love. Even when you know what love is it doesn't give you any idea of the other—only—only a mad longing for it."

She stopped suddenly. Never had she been so articulate. Martin's head was bent. She could not see his face. She was horribly afraid he had not understood.

"Are you cross with me?" she asked fearfully.

He turned then. He looked at her in a way he had never looked before. He was actually moved. Even worldly Martin was moved at the idea of a woman desiring, nay, importuning, to go down into the dark valley of motherhood, full of its unknown terrors and pains, for the chance of being suffered to come back from it with a living treasure in her arms!

Only a woman who stood for all that was wholesome and good could have made a man like Martin feel like that. For one single second he was touched by the Divine. And in that second Rose had her answer.

XVII

HONEYMOON DAYS

HOLIDAYS were among the many pleasures which Martin seldom indulged in. He prided himself on his strength of mind in abstaining from them. He regarded holidays with much the same dislike that he had for strong drink, music-halls, card-playing, and similar diversions that ordinary people indulge in.

But the turning point in his career changed his views about many things. Perhaps it was the new conjugal phase, perhaps the promised letter that shortly came from Sir Alfred. Anyhow, he decided on a holiday and took Rose down to Brighton.

How this suddenly conceived pleasure affected her may be imagined. She had never had a honeymoon; she had never had any leisure, any relief from household duties, any change of scene or air, since her marriage. The sea, the sun (it was early September and unusually hot), her first taste of hotel life, the sudden change into a new world full of new incidents, almost intoxicated her. She was a girl again, but a girl with the happy completeness of womanhood. She revelled in all their jaunts—the brake drive to the Devil's Dyke, the tram ride to Blackrock, the sail on the *Skylark*, the music on the pier, picnics on the blazing shingle.

They stayed at a second-rate temperance hotel where Martin was able to bargain for out-of-season terms.

They drank "Rosalia" on principle and as an advertisement, and were recompensed for their allegiance by the pleasure they got in seeing it blazoned on many hoardings. Oddly enough, the principal feature of the poster was a pretty girl not unlike Rose. In it there was the same rich coloring, the same ripeness of figure, the same winning smile. Except that the lithograph revealed an indiscreet amount of limb, and that the figure was drawn in a coquettish pose very foreign to Rose, the resemblance was considerable. Once, while they were looking at it, the remarks of a couple of young men rather upset Rose.

"Expect she sat for it. Very fetching, eh?"

"Ripping! Most of these models are."

Rose's face scorched; but Martin quite relished the criticism. The doubtful tribute to her good looks flattered his taste. He never resented the admiring glances directed at her by people on the front; and if a husband can tolerate the insolent stare of the Brighton promenaders, he must have great confidence in his wife or himself.

Over-confidence indeed was Martin's weakness. Brought up on text-books he was full of a smattering of many subjects without a sound knowledge of any. Except for a capacity to drive a hard bargain this over-confidence led him into many mistakes. The fact is he had little power of observation and no taste. Just as he had undervalued Rose, so he was apt to miss or overestimate the merits of inanimate things.

The many spurious "curio" shops which abound in Brighton were his undoing. He went about "collecting" antiques in these shops. He did not spend much; in fact, the limit of his outlay in each case was half a

crown. Guided by a shilling text-book entitled "Hints to Curio Hunters," he bought Baxter prints, Toby jugs and English brasswork of alleged antiquity. It never occurred to him that the compiler of the text-book might have no first-hand knowledge of his subject, that the authoritative statements contained in it were only the boiled-down dicta of other writers. After careful perusal of it he thought he had mastered all the acumen of the expert in collecting. Had he been told that the Baxters, the Toby jugs, and the rest of his purchases were all fresh from the fake-manufacturer who caters for the amateur collector and the amateur expert, he would not have believed it.

This was the beginning of his attempt to emulate Aunt Polly's profitable way of trading. If for three pounds she could buy a chest worth thirty guineas he felt equally competent to do the same. It was only a question of luck in coming across it. Who knew but that his half-crown Toby jug was not a rare specimen by Voyez worth ten pounds? Not that he would be in such a hurry to resell as Aunt Polly was. The longer you kept antiques the more they were worth. The author of "Hints to Curio Hunters" was insistent about what he called "the appreciation of values" and the advantages of "buying for investment."

Rose had to pretend to share in this enthusiasm for old things. They were nothing more than that to her. The hours she spent in back-street shops while Martin ferreted about with a magnifying glass, looking for "finds," frankly bored her. It seemed waste of time to ransack second-hand dealers' shops in beautiful Brighton when he could have done the same in London at his leisure. But she was too good a wife to grumble

openly. She put up with it, sighing sometimes when she contemplated the "ugly things" he brought away with him. She did not look forward to seeing them among the crimson plush ornaments of her drawing-room, which, he informed her, was to be their ultimate destination.

When, some weeks later, Aunt Polly saw them there poor Rose's mortification was complete. Ugly as she thought them, she at least assumed them to be genuine. Aunt Polly shattered that belief.

"Where did you get 'em?" she wanted to know, and laughed when Rose told her. "My word! They must have seen Martin comin'! It just shows you how Mr. Clever can be took in when he tries his hand at something he doesn't understand."

Rose was up in arms at once.

"But he does understand. He's got books and books about antiques," she protested.

"You can't buy antiques by books, my girl. It wants experience and knowing what's what. It took me years and years. And here's Martin tryin' to do it in five minutes! Bound to waste his money."

"Do you mean—really—they're not worth anything?"

"That's about it. I know the wholesale houses where all this lot come from. Beverley's and Lysons'. They're made by the thousand—marks, chips, dents and all—just to take people in. Duds, that's what they are."

"Duds?" echoed Rose. "What does that mean?"

"Fakes, imitations, wrong 'uns," translated Aunt Polly. "Same as Martin," she added to herself.

When the voice of truth is unmistakable a sensible person does not argue against it. Rose, being sensible, accepted Aunt Polly's opinion without a murmur. But

her disappointment was none the less keen on that account. What would Martin's be if he knew?

"Please, Aunt Polly, don't tell Martin what you've just said," she begged. "He—he wouldn't like it."

"I wasn't goin' to. He wouldn't believe it, so what's the use. That reminds me. Peacock's heard that he's leavin' Grimwoods'. Is it true?"

"I—I believe so," Rose hesitated.

"Is it a secret?"

Again Rose hesitated. Martin had not pledged her to silence about his affairs. Any day now it might be common knowledge that he was to be the new candidate for Hemford. There could be no harm in admitting so much to Aunt Polly. Aunt Polly, she knew, was to be trusted.

"Not exactly a secret," she said. "Only he doesn't like his affairs talked about. Yes, it's quite true he's leaving Grimwoods'."

"But why? Ain't he doin' well there? Or is he goin' to set up for himself?"

A gentle flush was coming into Rose's face. If she said any more she knew it would lead to a full admission of Martin's rapid rise in the world. Her pride in him was preventing her repressing the splendid news even now.

"Yes, he's going to set up for himself," she nodded.

By her manner Aunt Polly saw that there was some special significance in the words. Why that hesitation, that tell-tale color in the girl's face? For a single instant she had the startling conviction that Martin must be about to take a public-house. But only for an instant.

"Don't tell me if you don't want to, my dear," she said, curbing her curiosity.

"But that's what I *do* want, Aunt Polly. I can't keep it in any longer! Only promise you won't say a word—for the present."

"You know me, don't you? I'm no chatterbox."

Rose nodded. "*Martin's going into Parliament!*" she whispered.

It took a long, sit-down conversation to make the astounding news clear to Aunt Polly, though afterwards she wondered at its necessity. Parliament meant speechifying, and Martin had always been one to talk. For months he had done nothing else. What she could not fathom was how he could afford to give up his salary at Grimwoods'. She put a straight question to this effect, but Rose, who knew nothing of Martin's monetary arrangement with Gammel and Liversidge, was unable to answer it. Aunt Polly was more mystified than ever.

Nearly three months had elapsed since she had seen Rose. Looking at her now, with her mind full of the changed conditions imminent in the young people's lives, she became aware of a corresponding change in Rose. What was it? The question was not asked aloud, but Rose, meeting her eyes, saw it there and answered it with a shy nod.

"Whatever will Martin say?" broke involuntarily from the old woman.

"Martin said 'Yes,' " rejoined Rose, off her guard.

Then a dreamy contentment fell upon her. She sat quite still, with her pretty plump hands idle in her lap. Aunt Polly remained silent; but an expression of unwonted softness came into her face. In the remote days when she was twenty-five, and life had not become all drab-colored and sordid with ceaseless transactions in second-hand goods, she, too, had known what it is to dream.

XVIII

A FAIRY TALE COME TRUE

HOW Gammel and Liversidge managed to rid themselves and Hemford of its parliamentary representative does not concern this story. That they did it without any consideration for that gentleman's feelings may be taken for granted. Knowing his new employers, Martin could guess at their methods; but as the result left him on the upward grade he did not see any necessity to inquire closely into its causes. He confined himself to going about with sedate speed on his own affairs.

Twice already, accompanied by Liversidge, he had paid covert visits to Hemford to be introduced to the local party leaders. On the second of these the nomination had been provisionally offered him and duly accepted. Not until then had the deposition of the sitting member been effected.

It was a great day for Martin when the papers, from the *Times* to the *Sentinel*, announced the resignation, and in the same paragraph made it known that he would contest the vacant seat. This first taste of real publicity stirred him to his depths. To be known, to be talked about, to be in the papers, was infinitely more to him than the performance or achievement of anything. Fame was foreign to him; he never thought about it, had no desire for it. Notoriety he understood, because there was

money in it. Millionaires were always notorious, never famous. He hungered for notoriety.

So that when the office boy of the *Sentinel* called at Routh Villas with a column-long proof-slip detailing Martin's career, and the editor's compliments and request that he would pass it for publication, he could have hugged the dirty urchin with delight. Frankly, he hardly recognized himself in the laudatory notice. From it a stranger would have gathered that Martin possessed all the special qualities that make for statesmanship. A discreet silence was maintained concerning his humble beginnings, his Board-school education, and his youthful avocation of errand boy to a grocer. As to his origin, he discovered that his father (a small plumber and an indifferent one at that) had been known and respected as an engineer of originality and skill. Rose, too, shared in the unctuous fable: she was the beautiful daughter of the late Mrs. Metcalf, a lady of independent means! Three press-cutting agencies made subsequent use of the flattering tale to draw Martin's attention to their services. The subscription he took out with one of them and continued ever after fed his egotism without surfeiting it.

The day at last came, one in late spring, when, accompanied by Rose, he set out to make his public entry into Hemford, there to open his canvass of the constituency. In the cab on the way to the station, Rose felt mildly excited, but when Martin bought first-class tickets something like awe took hold of her. She had never traveled first-class in her life before. In the compartment, which they had to themselves, all she could do was to sit and survey its well-upholstered comfort.

"My dear!" said Martin. "Don't look so astonished, or people will think you're not used to it."

"Are we always going first-class in future?" she asked in wonder.

"On special occasions—occasions like this, when we shall be met by important people. I want you to look quite at your ease when we get to Hemford."

"It's all very well for you. You're always at your ease. It comes natural to you, somehow." Martin's frock coat and silk hat, not to speak of the new and glossy tan gloves he had purchased for the occasion, were always enough to make Rose attribute gentility to their wearer. "But this is all so strange to me. I'm afraid of doing the wrong thing."

"You needn't be. You've got a new dress on, and you look a lady. Do you remember what I prophesied years ago?—that one day you'd be dressed in silk, and hear people you passed whisper, 'There goes the wife of Leffley, the M.P.' It's all but come true! In another month or so it *will* be true!"

She had almost forgotten the occasion. His reminder of it and the fulfilment of his words struck her as almost uncanny. He took no notice of the discomfort in her face.

"Just try and feel like a lady," he went on. "You won't find it difficult. It's so important we should make the right sort of impression in Hemford."

"I'll try, dear," she sighed.

She had the vaguest idea of what was before her. She was proud of sharing Martin's importance, but not a little fearful of the *terra incognita* of politics and the new social plane which she was approaching.

"By the way," he said, "we'll be staying at 'The

Crown.' It's the best hotel. We mustn't consider expense there."

"But how are you going to afford it? The bill—and going about first-class!"

"Don't bother about that," he replied, without informing her that their expenses were guaranteed by Gammel. "You see, it's essential for us to spend money. It's expected of me as candidate. I shall have to support local industries and subscribe to local charities. I've figured it all out. You must spend money, too. You can lay out twenty pounds at drapers and milliners."

It was more than would have sufficed her for eighteen months. So that was why he had bought her a new dress-basket, lettered "R.L."

"Really and truly?" she exclaimed.

"Yes. You'd better find out from Mrs. Wickett—Wickett's the chairman of my committee; we're going to lunch with them first—find out from her which are the best shops to go to. Don't let her think you need any new clothes. Let it look as if you thought you ought to patronize the Hemford shops. And when you buy anything, be sure you don't offer to pay for it. Just mention that you're staying at 'The Crown Hotel.'"

Rose wondered how she would have the hardihood to order dresses on credit in a strange shop—she who all her life had paid ready money for everything, over the counter or at her own door! She nodded comprehension, but all the same the immediate future seemed to her to be full of pitfalls. And here was another in the form of a luncheon party unexpectedly sprung on her.

"Are they gentry—the Wicketts?" she faltered.

"Well—not exactly. Mr. Wickett's one of Hemford's leading men, an ironmonger, in a large way of business."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried, a load of care off her mind.

Her matronly appearance notwithstanding, Rose had never looked prettier than she did at this period. Moreover, she felt remarkably well. Only the very discerning would have noticed her condition. Occasionally it made her languid, but not unbecomingly so. That she should lack confidence in herself at such a time was not surprising.

Martin, characteristically wanting in sensitiveness, had none of Rose's qualms. Over-sure of himself, he was able to impose on others a sense of capacity which he did not really possess. But for his habitual gravity it would have been recognized as colossal conceit. It is a curious fact that men like Martin and Gammel and Liversidge—the men who get on above their deserts—are invariably proof against ridicule.

So that when the train ran into Hemford station, where Wickett and others of Martin's political supporters were awaiting his arrival, he accepted their presence as his due. The ironmonger had brought his wife and daughter, the latter a frizzy-haired child, encumbered with a huge bouquet. The moment Rose alighted little Miss Wickett was pushed towards her.

"Oh, is it for me?" Rose exclaimed. She was bewildered by the attention, which she associated with the reception of royalty.

"Yes; kiss her," prompted Martin in a quick aside.

Rose did so, murmuring confused thanks. Then came introductions, platitudinous remarks from the little deputation, and shy, agonized rejoinders from Rose. Not

until she made the surprising discovery that Mrs. Wickett was as nervous as herself did her self-possession come back. Incredible as it might seem, Mrs. Wickett showed her a deference that is only accorded by an inferior to one of high station. Rose's ears would have tingled if she had known of Martin's exaggerations, purposely made to create this effect on their hostess.

Still, she did not feel happy in the open carriage that took them from the station. The management of a bouquet would at any time have incommoded her, but in a carriage and in public it seemed to grow and magnify until it attained dimensions that made her horribly conspicuous. It also seemed to her that everybody in Hemford had eyes for her alone. She and Mrs. Wickett occupied the back seat; that lady's husband and Martin faced them; the small child, dressed in white, sat on the box with the coachman. Rose had a conviction that a private carriage, so filled, would at any time have created a sensation in the grimy manufacturing town. But Martin smiled contentedly throughout the drive. He would rather have liked the addition of flags.

The lunch was one of those formal affairs to which Rose in after years became so inured that they not only brought her no sense of discomfort but sometimes a positive one of satisfaction, because either they were given in honor of Martin or graced by his presence. But formality at this period kept her attention on the stretch. She was for ever trying to do and say the right thing without being quite sure whether she succeeded. Afterwards, at "The Crown," she had another ordeal. Everybody there knew who she and Martin were, and made no effort to conceal their curiosity. The way Rose was looked at made her feel unclothed.

Still, unknown to herself, she possessed a great deal of latent adaptability. Very soon her nervousness wore off. She went shopping with Mrs. Wickett, and in a seven-guinea costume and a new hat bought at that lady's favorite draper's made her first appearance on a public platform. The occasion was the opening meeting of Martin's political campaign. Liversidge and Sir Alfred Gammel had both come down for it. The millionaire's austere manner underwent a complete change towards Rose. It might almost be said of him that he gave her the "glad eye" when he thought Martin was not looking. It was wasted on her, if not on Martin.

The big platform had not a vacant seat; the hall was packed, and Martin spoke for nearly an hour, including the time taken up with cheers. Before her marriage Rose had occasionally been taken to theaters and enjoyed them; but the pleasures of the pit or gallery and the glamor of the stage of those days were as nothing to the transports she experienced at this meeting. It had a twofold fascination for her, that of the stage and the auditorium combined. Every word that Martin uttered that night seemed part of herself; every burst of applause that he got was the crystallization of her own admiration for him.

It only wanted this to make Rose an ideal canvasser for the man she loved.

XIX

MARTIN LEFFLEY, M.P.

THANKS to better organization and the slim tactics of the Gammel party, Martin had several days' start of his opponent. While the Unionists, caught napping as usual, were frantically engaged in getting their electoral machinery into gear he was busy canvassing and holding meetings.

As a canvasser, Rose was of inestimable value. She got votes on her face. Martin was well enough liked, but not for the same reason. People who judged by first impressions were apt to find something unsympathetic about him. The staidness of his manner ended by making them think they were mistaken. After all, he had come down with the reputation of being not only a "people's man" but Gammel's man; and in Hemford, where the Gammel and allied interests almost controlled the working-class vote, his apparent sympathy with the cause of the people was accordingly taken for granted. His way of referring to "the women and the little children" was enough to discount any criticism on that score.

Then, his artful nostrum of "Education" as a panacea for all their economic disabilities was regarded as something new. It *sounded* right to their unenlightened ears. The very obscurity of its many-trumpeted advantages had the same attraction for them as a popu-

lar patent medicine. They swallowed it in blind faith. Of course Martin had not forgotten to rail at "the Oxford manner," in itself a plausible way of getting credit for the new and misleading doctrine. Besides, irony of this sort helped in another way: the Unionist candidate was an Oxford man!

But Rose went blandly into the fray with only love as a weapon. She did not ask for support for Martin because of his views or his capacity, but just because he was her husband. She did not cajole; she made it a personal matter. Her directness, her simplicity and her winning ways were worth a thousand specious arguments. Men of undecided opinions hardly tried to withstand her appeal; she won over many a staunch supporter of the opposite camp; all the mothers were on her side; she was of their sisterhood; every wife felt something in common with her. She worked wonders without knowing it.

Though she was with Martin heart and soul throughout these days she lived another life apart from him. It was spent in the charmed world of expectant motherhood—a world of tender and poetic thoughts, gentle imaginings, deep contentment. In the midst of a crowded political meeting, while she was sitting on the platform within arm's length of him, listening enraptured to every word that fell from his lips, she would drift off into a soft day-dream of her own and become oblivious of her surroundings, of everything except the one coming miracle that held her mind entranced.

Without knowing it she was overtaxing her strength. She grew more languid, more tired every day. Martin, unsparing of himself because of what the issue meant to him, keen to get the last ounce out of everybody who

was working for him, and for once sufficiently observant of Rose as a piece of electoral machinery to see that she was relaxing her efforts, spurred her on to fresh ones. The poll was less than a week off. Any slackening of energy might be fatal to his chances.

So he kept her at it, telling himself that driving about in a carriage, canvassing, was easy work, beneficial to her health and instructive to her mind. Indeed, the political arena into which he had dragged her seemed to him to offer her a healthy interest at a period when most women would be apt to give way to morbidity and vague dreads.

It was perhaps unfortunate, in fact rather an inconvenience, that the election and Rose's approaching confinement should so nearly coincide. He did not know when the latter event was exactly due. He had not inquired very closely about it. The Puritan in him made him avoid the subject. So long as Rose did not complain—and women always complained when they did not feel well—there could be nothing to worry about. Besides, the election gave him quite enough to think of. In a few days they would be home again. Meanwhile, it did not occur to him that in overtaking Rose's strength he might be precipitating matters.

On the morning of the poll he was too excited to notice how she looked. He swallowed his breakfast and hurried off to his Committee room, taking it for granted that she would follow him. He hardly thought about her for the rest of the day. He did not miss her. His mind had room for one thought only; to hear himself acclaimed M.P. for Hemford. He kept on the rush, going from polling station to polling station, conferring with Wickett, with Liversidge, with one and other of the

crowd of supporters and sympathizers who made up his present world. That he was going to get in he had no doubt. What he was bent on was to get in with a bigger majority than his predecessor's.

Rose sat on at the breakfast table. She had eaten nothing. She had no appetite. Martin hadn't noticed that; neither had he noticed that she looked ill. She had purposely done her best to hide it. She knew how he felt. She did not want to distract his mind from the business of the day. If he knew she was unwell it would upset him; it might make a difference to the result of the election. No doubt she would feel better soon and be able to go on to the Committee room and encourage him. She didn't think she would be up to doing more than that.

But instead of getting better she got worse. She was in pain. She tried to forget it by busying herself with Martin's press-cuttings. There were such a lot, all about his speeches and parliamentary prospects. They had accumulated during the last few days, and wanted pasting in the big book which he had bought for the purpose. It was extraordinary how large the scissors seemed, how heavy they felt. Her eyes found a difficulty in following the columns of print. She felt sick and shivery, and had to give up the task. She was forcibly reminded of the time when she had attempted to whitewash the ceiling. The same nausea was upon her, aggravated by an intensifying pain. She thought she had better go to her bedroom and lie down. Perhaps it was the excitement that made her feel so bad. No doubt she would be all right again when she knew that Martin was safely "in." But that wouldn't

be for hours. She couldn't help wishing he were with her. She was lonely and afraid.

She got upstairs at last. A chambermaid was in the room just finishing making the bed. Rose almost fell towards it. The girl turned a startled face on her.

"Oh, ma'am!" she cried. "Don't you—want a doctor?"

Rose, in sudden agony, caught at the knob of the bedstead.

"I—I believe I do," she gasped.

Martin was sent for, but the message never reached him. The evening was far advanced before Rose came fully to herself. The taste of chloroform was in her mouth. She was too dazed and weak to realize what had happened to her. Strange people were in the room, a doctor and a nurse; but for a long time their presence made no perceptible impression on her mind. When at last it did she just wondered in a vague way what had been the matter with her, and then her thoughts went to Martin. It seemed late. The election must surely be over. In a tired voice she said she would like to know the result.

The doctor misunderstood her.

"The best of results," he chirped. "One of each! Wouldn't you like to look at them, Mrs. Leffley?"

Rose pondered the statement. It seemed meaningless. She lay still, trying to think it out. Quite abruptly understanding came to her—came with a sense of small bodies, warm, soft, very close to her.

"Twins!" she faltered, looking in bewilderment from downy head to downy head. "Oh! . . . What will Martin say?"

And yet, over and above the problem of what Martin would say was the surprise and joy of this double glory. All the past months she had held love in her heart for one child; now, because its source was infinite, it gushed and welled over in adoration of both her babies. Martin had given her one of himself; she had given him one of herself! A boy and a girl, the nurse said. It was just perfect, and—and—she was very tired. Her cheeks were wet. Tears were coursing down them.

"There now, dear!" soothed the nurse. "There now! Don't cry. It's all over!"

Rose tried to tell her that she was crying for joy, but words were such a trouble. She wondered whether her babies felt as weak as she did. They looked so red and strong.

Outside in the street the clatter of feet and the sound of many voices had been continuous. Accustomed to it Rose had not noticed it. But now a distant clamor arose, growing in strength and volume as it drew nearer. She knew it at once as the voice of a crowd—cheering. Instantly she was wide awake, listening.

"Open the window, please—wide. I—want—to hear," she said with a catch in her voice.

The doctor nodded and the nurse obeyed. Instantly the room was full of a babel of sound, the uproar of a surging crowd shouting itself hoarse. But through the discord a dominant note came to Rose's eager ears:

"Leffley! Leffley! Leffley for ever!"

It was like music to her. A look of peace came into her face.

"Martin Leffley, M.P.!" she murmured, and fell asleep.

BOOK II

XX

THE TWINS

ALTHOUGH it was only the end of March the sun shone on lawn and flower-beds with the suave warmth of a fine May day. From the house, double-fronted and detached, mature laurels and leafy trees made the garden look larger than it was. Through this screen you could see very little of the low brick walls that separated it from the adjoining gardens. Only from its further end were the houses flanking "Tivoli" observable. Martin had so named his new home in remembrance of a ten days' tour (at the rate of seven guineas per person) which he and Rose had made in Italy some years previously. At the time it escaped him that a London music-hall had anticipated him in the use of the name. When the fact was brought to his notice he was extremely annoyed. It was then too late to alter it. He had already laid in two reams of headed notepaper and a supply of visiting cards, to waste which he could not reconcile himself. So "Tivoli" it had remained, and thanks to his ostrich-like capacity for ignoring anything he did not like or understand the unfortunate music-hall association was dismissed from his mind.

It was a good-sized house of rather pretentious build. Overlooking the garden, to which access could be had

through long double casements now wide open, was the library, the largest of its rooms and the one in most use. Here, on this pleasant afternoon, Rose sat darning. Darning socks was a task she had never been able to bring herself to leave to a subordinate. She regarded it as a sacred duty to her family. Her basket contained a diversified pile of socks and stockings—Martin's, her own, and the twins'. It was quite easy to distinguish which were which. Good black Lisle thread on the one hand, black cashmere on the other, denoted the elder couple's hosiery; light hues and bright colors those of the twins. The former might have been labeled *circa* 1890, the latter 1914. On the work-basket were also a small pile of tradesmen's books, the top one spread open. As Rose plied her darning needle she conned the column of items enumerated in it. The housewifely virtues were still strong in her.

A bonny-looking woman was Rose. The years had not brought a line to her face. It was fuller and a little deeper in color than when the twins were born, and her figure, always on the exuberant side, had expanded. But no gray showed in her abundant brown hair: she was the same Rose as of yore, fully matured, irradiating contentment and cheerfulness.

That her frame of mind was still of the calm order was shown by her inattention to a succession of heavy bumps which shook the ceiling overhead. They indicated the movements of a vigorous young person full of boisterous youth. Even when the bang of a door and quick patter of feet coming down the staircase followed the overhead bumping she did no more than turn a smiling face over her shoulder. The pattering feet came to a stop in the hall. There was a short silence.

Then the library door opened and a big girl of seventeen bounced in with a letter in her hand.

A beam of motherly love lighted up Rose's face. She had every reason to feel proud of this well-favored daughter of hers. She was what Rose herself had been at seventeen, but taller and consequently shapelier. In addition to these advantages she had a personality wanting in Rose. Nor was it derived from her father. The first things noticeable about her were her high spirits and patent look of frankness. Both the twins had these qualities in common. The high spirits showed now in the boisterous hug which she gave her mother.

"Well, my lady, darling, getting used to it!" she asked playfully.

"Dorothy!" remonstrated Rose, not at all seriously. "I shall never get used to your hugs. You squeeze the breath out of me! If you mean my new title I like it, except when the servants get mixed between 'ma'am' and 'my lady.' Who's the letter for?"

"You. It looks as if Aunt Polly wrote it directly after cleaning flues."

"Where's your father?" Rose asked guardedly as she took it. She was always a little afraid lest Martin should put a stop to the correspondence which she kept up with his old aunt. As he had got on in the world so, in equal degree, had he tried to drop Aunt Polly. He thought of her now as the bar sinister on the scutcheon of his week-old knighthood. Rose, quite unaffected by the change of circumstances, kept up the intimacy. She never forgot the brusque kindnesses which the old woman had always shown her, her skill in getting Dorothy over infantile complaints, nor her constant generosity to her son, Edgar, expressed in half-

sovereigns at frequent intervals. Indeed, the twins were great favorites of Aunt Polly's. Peacock had long since succumbed to the strong spirits which had been his weakness, and his widow no longer carried on the shop. She lived in a small private house, and was not ostensibly engaged in trade.

Dorothy quite understood why her mother wanted to know where her father was. A tacit understanding existed between Rose and her children on the subject of Aunt Polly. The old, common and ill-dressed but amiable member of the family was only discussed in the absence of its head.

"Sir Martin Leffley is in his study cleaning his antique brasses with his special duster and private tin of Blue-bell polish," she answered cheekily. "Do let's see what Aunt Polly says, mother. She's always so amusing. Isn't it funny having a relation like that when we're getting such awful swells? I wonder if Daddy means to end in an old Norman castle and go about in a suit of armor. He's great on helmets and battle-axes just now."

"Your father is a very wonderful man, and you're not to make fun of him. I'm sure he'd look splendid in armor if he had a fancy that way," was Rose's reproof as she opened the letter.

She did not see Dorothy's comic grimace. The girl was behind her, reading over her shoulder. Aunt Polly's envelope, if not exactly suggestive of flues, had a decidedly second-hand appearance which illiterate handwriting did nothing to ameliorate. It was addressed to "Lady Leffley, The Tivoli, Grange Gardens, Cricklewood, N.W." (Aunt Polly always gave Martin's house the

benefit of the definite article), and the letter ran as follows:

"MY DEAR ROSE,—

"I suppose Martin wouldn't take it as a complement if I was to write and congratulate *him* so I don't. I saw it in the paper yesterday though what he done to go and get nighted I can't imagine the paper don't say. If it's something he don't want talked about well and good I'm not the one to ask questions. Of course if you like being a Lady I'm glad he's made Sir though it will always sound funny to me. This is to say that I hope it won't make any difference between me and you and that you'll come and see me just the same next time Martin's away for the day which isn't often enough. My love to Dolly and Edgar and congratulations if you want it. Your affect.

"MARY PEACOCK.

"P.S.—My leg don't heal. The doctor says it's Poverty of the Blood. Tell the children I got something for their birthday when they come to see me."

Rose folded up the letter.

"I'd better not leave it lying about," she said meditatively, and was about to put it in her workbox when Dorothy took it from her and tore it into small pieces.

"We *do* have to be circumspect about the poor old thing," she remarked. "Daddy's so awfully clever that I can't understand why he doesn't see that the higher one is the less prestige one loses by taking notice of people who are a step lower down. After all, Aunt Polly's his own blood relation."

"Daddy has always the best of reasons for everything he does. You *do* stand up to him, Dolly dear. It vexes him sometimes."

"Compared with some girls I'm awfully meek. You know, Mummy, there's something about Daddy that makes my knees shake. Edgar feels the same. He looks

at us sometimes just as if we were jellies that had turned out of a mold the wrong shape to what he intended—a sort of ‘can these be *my* children?’ expression. It’s rather freezing.”

Rose felt it was time to administer a rebuke.

“I don’t like to hear you criticizing your father like that,” she said. “When you think of all you owe him—a first-class education at one of the best schools, with extras like your expensive drawing lessons, and the dress allowance he’s made you, and Edgar’s holiday in Germany, you ought to think yourselves very lucky children. Although he’s been knighted he hasn’t a thought except for you two——”

“That’s just it, darling. He thinks about us too much. Not what we eat or drink—though I must say ‘Rosalia’ at dinner as well as supper is a bit thick—nor how we’re clothed, but what we’re *doing* all the time. It makes us want to do things without his knowing, just because he *wants* to know. Take Aunt Polly for instance. What harm is there in going to see her? And yet we have to do it on the quiet.”

“Aunt Polly has tried your father very much.”

“And then there’s to-night. We’ve got to be deceitful again.”

“What about to-night?” Rose asked uneasily.

“Well, you and father are going to a banquet to celebrate his knighthood, aren’t you?”

Rose sighed and began rolling up the socks. “Oh, dear, yes, I suppose so. And it’s time I began to think what I’m to wear. I would much rather have stopped at home. And on your birthdays, too!”

“We’re going to a theater.”

Again a serious look came into Rose’s face. Success

had not relaxed any of Martin's rigid views about dissipation. If anything, it had increased them. Theaters were one item in a long black-list of forbidden things. Remembering this, Dorothy had avoided saying anything about going to one until now, trusting to her mother not to veto it or to tell. A man may not be able to serve two masters, but a woman frequently can and does. Rose did. Her allegiance was divided between Martin and her children.

"Oh, my dear, I wish you hadn't told me," was all she said. "It seems so unkind to stop your pleasure on your birthday."

"You wouldn't stop it for worlds, you dear," the girl laughed. "There goes the front door. It must be Edgar."

Rose listened. She heard her son mounting the stairs, and then the opening of Martin's study door on the first landing. Something was said. Edgar, seemingly, replied to it with thanks. Almost immediately he came down again and opened the library door, carrying four big new books.

"Father's present," he observed, putting them down before kissing his mother.

"Are they nice books, darling?" she asked.

"Oh, I expect so," he replied captiously. "I rather wanted Hamel and Turner on Aeronautics, but I daresay I'll read these some day."

Dorothy picked up the books. "'Hodgson on Porcelain,' 'Old Dutch Delft,' 'Wanklyn's English Furniture,' 'Eighteenth Century Engravers,'" she read out. "What stodge!"

"I suppose they cost a lot," Edgar grudgingly admitted. He balanced himself on the arm of Rose's chair.

"I say, Mum, the fellows have been chipping me no end because of this beastly knighthood of the governor's. I don't know that I like it. They keep on pestering to know *what* he got it for."

"Yes, what *has* he got it for?" echoed Dorothy.

Poor Rose looked rather helpless. "My dears," she said, "those who gave it to him could tell you better than I can. All that we need think about is that it's an honor only given to the very deserving."

"The Tories don't think so," mumbled Edgar. "One of the fellows in my form showed me a paper he'd got. 'Old England,' it's called, and it wanted to know about the governor. It said something about his mediocrity, and the reckless way the Government had of debasing the fountain of honor. It was a beastly thing to have to read about him." A scowl was on the boy's face, but quite suddenly it disappeared. A doting look took its place. He put his arms round Rose and said: "I don't care if they *have* made a howler over father. It's you, mother, who ought to have had the title. If you ever want a champion you count on me. I'm your own true knight."

For a moment Rose did not know whether to look shocked or pleased. To her, Martin's knighthood was the reward of unalloyed merit. The fact that it had been conferred on him was all the proof she wanted. She would no more have questioned his deserts than she would have doubted the inspiration of the Scriptures. And yet it was apparent that the twins did not seem quite convinced that their father's knighthood was a matter for unrestrained rejoicing. She could only suppose that this want of enthusiasm was explained by the "standing up" attitude which they frequently adopted

towards him—a sort of juvenile pugnacity. She knew their sentiments towards herself were those of whole-hearted adoration. On Edgar's part especially so. So, with eyes full of love, she got up and stood between her two children. She was immensely proud of these wonderful beings who towered a good four inches over her. They made her feel such a little mother.

“Oh, children!” she cried, and held out loving arms.

XXI

LADY LEFFLEY

ROSE did not boast a maid of her own. Martin's income did not permit of such a luxury. Moreover, she would have felt uncomfortable with a personal attendant about her. A woman who darns her own stockings from choice prefers to do her own dressing.

The Leffleys lived what they liked to call a plain and wholesome life, which meant plenty to eat without much variety, and very English cooking. The principal meal of the day, by courtesy called lunch, was served at the old hour of one o'clock. Supper at eight was called dinner. Neither Martin nor Rose had outlived the customs of their youth. They only made believe to do so when they had "company."

So when Rose went up to dress for the ceremonial dinner for which they were engaged that evening she managed for herself, except for faithful and now middle-aged Jane's assistance with some refractory hooks and eyes which refused to accommodate themselves to their wearer's *embonpoint*. This increase of plumpness, to which Rose had always been prone, was becoming a growing anxiety to her. Martin did not approve of it. With increasing age his tastes ran to the more youthful and slenderer charms of womanhood, and he contrived to let Rose know of it. It meant that, to satisfy it, she had to lace tighter than was comfortable. Also to

please him she wore dresses considerably more *décolleté* than she cared about. To-night, in a black sequin gown, bare-necked and bare-armed, she was not at all satisfied with her appearance, and glad that the twins were out of the way. A sense of propriety made her feel that it was not "quite nice" for Edgar to see his mother so much exposed.

Coming out of his dressing-room in full evening rig, Martin surveyed his wife with the same bland approval that he had just given to his own reflection in the glass. The wearing of dress clothes was an exception with him, not a custom; and like most men of his condition of life, he did not look at home in them. Of this he was quite insensible. In fact, he considered he was at his best in dress clothes—as much a gentleman as a gentleman can look. He might be conscious of an indefinable difference between himself and men of breeding, but it did not affect him as a comparison unfavorable to himself. It only annoyed him in the same way as the "Oxford manner" annoyed him.

The only fault he could find with Rose was her overplumpness. Rose did very nearly look a lady. Her amiable disposition, her transparent honesty, her pride in being Martin's wife, and above all her modesty, contributed to a gentle air of dignity that made her seem at ease when she often felt the reverse. In a way she had repose. Although she frequently quaked inwardly she had become an adept in the small affairs of public life that fell to her lot—the making of a little speech on behalf of a charity, the opening of a minor bazaar, an address to working girls. She accomplished these duties with a sweet reasonableness that was very taking.

Although she could not see it, time had dealt less

kindly with Martin. Twenty years of strained effort had not taken him very far, not nearly so far as he had hoped to get. He had managed to keep his Hemford seat and also Gammel's yearly subsidy, until parliamentary jobbery had given him a salary of £400 a year in place of it. He also had money in "Liversidge, Limited," now an enormous concern with branches all over the country, which paid a dividend of thirty per cent. "Rosalia" still brought him in a considerable sum, but it was not the money-maker it had been. In all, his income slightly exceeded a thousand a year.

But none of "the soft things" he had looked for, no Government sinecure, had come his way. It was not for the want of asking. He had pestered the patronage departments of his party for this and that post without avail. The fact is, in Parliament Martin had quickly found his level. He was neither esteemed nor liked there. In that acute-minded assembly his abilities were not rated above their true value. The Whips knew all about his first election for Hemford: they knew all about Gammel. They might engineer jobs of their own, and distribute favors among the tried supporters of the Government, but the sweets of office were not for such as Martin Leffley. The Gammel crowd had since become a thorn in the Government's flesh. They knew them for what they were, a hard and grasping lot whose motto was, "It's your money we want"; men who would let the country go to the devil so long as their own private ends were served. And although of late years it had been apparent that Martin no longer enjoyed their confidence and that he claimed to be an orthodox Liberal, the Whips regarded him as a political Ishmael no more to be trusted than his old masters. So, as a

cheap way of getting rid of his importunities, they had given him a knighthood. It was a barren honor, as Martin knew, but with Liversidge in possession of it, as he now was, and because of the sop to his vanity which it provided, he was glad enough to accept it.

Many of Martin's fond illusions had vanished since he had got into Parliament. One of them had been his belief that Cabinet rank implied the soul of virtue and probity. When he made the discovery that two prominent members of the Ministry were just as hard drinkers as Peacock, and that the moral reputation of another—the one he most revered—was about as dingy as Aunt Polly's time-honored bonnet, he could not at first credit it. And to find that these lapses were the talk of the House and the cause of quiet amusement in the Lobbies, put a finishing touch to his amazement.

Martin, in fact, was a soured man. His perpetual itch for money had gone unsatisfied. Politics had brought him no power and knighthood no respect. In the House he already felt it to be a satire on him: only the tradespeople in Cricklewood gave it face value.

In point of appearance Martin had not changed much in the last seventeen years. He weighed more, but he was just as angular; his hair was gray, his clean-shaven face more lined, his eyes just as watchful as of yore. He was narrower than ever in his views and harder to deal with.

To-night, however, he felt more expansive than usual. He would be the shining light at a gathering of unimportant people who would accord full honor to the new handle to his name. He patted Rose's bare shoulder approvingly.

"You're a fine woman, my dear," he said.

She blushed like a girl.

"Oh, Martin! Don't you think I'm just a little——"
An upward hitch of the low-cut bodice finished the sentence.

"Not at all. When a woman has a neck and shoulders like yours she's justified in showing them."

"I shall never get used to these banquets," she declared, picking up her gloves. "It seems such a funny idea eating one's dinner half undressed."

He helped her on with her cloak.

"You ought to have got over that sort of thing," he said in a superior way. "It's plebeian. You must think of your rank now."

Jane put her head in at the door.

"The motor's come, ma'am—my lady," she corrected herself, and retired reddening.

It was a hired landaulet. One of Martin's grievances against circumstance was his inability to afford a motor-car of his own. If wishes were horses—or horse power, to be precise—he would have owned a fleet of cars long ago. No footsore beggar had a greater desire to ride in state than he. He had always been full of wishes and ambitions which somehow he had never been able to realize to their full extent. He considered the twins answerable for this deprivation. If it had not been for them he might have had a car years ago. It was no deprivation to Rose. She could be perfectly contented with a motor-bus or get enjoyment out of a taxi ride. As they drove along she slipped her plump hand into Martin's and gave it an affectionate squeeze. It seemed more like a fairy tale than ever to think that he and she, mere nobodies to start with, now belonged to the upper classes (a belief which her simplicity did not

permit her to doubt), and were driving in a nearly private car to dine with important and distinguished people, another illusion of her homely credulity. But she wished she felt some of the joy that fairy people were supposed to experience. If only she and Martin were on their way to dine alone together! Just a simple meal in a country cottage somewhere out of London! Rose's mind always reverted to the country when in pursuit of the ideal.

The warmth of the evening made the air of the closed carriage oppressive. The smell of the asphalt added to its fustiness. She felt stifled.

"Too hot?" Martin asked, lowering the window an inch or two.

"A little. It will be hotter at dinner, though, Martin!" She squeezed his unresponsive hand again. "I was just wishing we were driving through country lanes in an open cab on a night like this, and the smell of hedge-flowers and dew——"

"Where?" he asked unimaginatively.

"Anywhere, miles from London. Or—or I was wishing we were a happy couple who'd never been out of their pretty village, and just grown old together in a little thatched cottage with a tiny garden all flowers and a few beehives——"

He withdrew his hand. Contact with hers made it unpleasantly warm.

"And a dinner of bread and potatoes?" he asked, untouched by such futile imaginings.

A line from the Bible was running in Rose's mind: "Better a dinner of herbs where love is. . . ."

But Martin was thinking of turtle-soup.

XXII

IN THE DARK

MARTIN put out the light and got into bed. "A very pleasant evening," he observed.

"Yes, dear," agreed Rose.

"I was particularly gratified by the flattering way in which I was toasted. Some of the sentiments were very well expressed. The one concerning the Government's recognition of my long career in the people's service especially so."

"Yes. But what I liked best was *your* speech. It was so modest and yet so—so dignified. It seemed in a way to put you so much higher up than the other people who were there."

Martin mumbled something about the intellectual standard and its automatic way of asserting itself. After a dignified pause he added:

"After all, it's a pleasant reflection to realize that one hasn't stood still all these years."

"Yes, dear. You *have* worked!"

"The only thing I have to complain of is that money hasn't come in as fast as it might have done. I'm inclined to think that my long association with the Liversidge lot has had something to do with that."

"Why?"

"Well, they're rather a thorn in the side of the Gov-

ernment. They've got too much influence, and they adopt a selfish policy. I've suffered from it."

"But if they've got influence, and you're in with them, why is it——"

"I'm not in with them now. Not actually, that is. I vote with them for the sake of expediency. If I did not I might not hold Hemford. As a party they're strong enough to do without me. It makes my position rather difficult."

Which meant that he had reached the stage of the dog that is ready to bite the hand that feeds it and is only restrained by fear of the consequences.

"They couldn't do you any harm, could they?" Rose asked. She sensed unspoken danger in Martin's tone.

"You never know with people of their sort. They're absolutely ruthless in crushing any kind of opposition. And they're extremely secretive. Even the Government have to handle them very carefully. You see, they control so many interests, and they've got the press behind them. That's why they don't need to make speeches in the House. Their own newspapers do it for them, and those they don't own can't afford to attack them because of their immense outlay on advertisement. There's Liversidge, for instance, with a whole page in some 'daily' or other every day in the week! The same with Gammel and Witt and a dozen others. Their money absolutely ties the hands of the press. Of course, it means that they exercise the worst kind of monopoly, because it's not direct, not obvious to the public. That's what the Government don't like. They have constantly to be prepared against pressure from the Gammel section whenever it's a question of something running counter

to their personal interests. The only good they do is to prevent public money being wasted on armaments. I'm against that sort of extravagance myself, and keep in with them by voting against the Army and Navy estimates, and also Tariff Reform. Still, I confess the rest of their policy is purely one of feathering their own nests at the expense of every other class."

"How shocking!" declared Rose. "But surely they were not like that at first?"

"They were, but I didn't know it. At least, I didn't know how clever they were."

"They must have been clever to have got hold of you. Still, if they hadn't given you the chance of getting into Parliament you mightn't have got another."

"I don't know so much about that."

His tone did not carry much conviction. Of late he had often wondered whether, without Liversidge's backing, he would have reached his present position. Twice his majority at Hemford had shown a dangerous decline. Would there be any majority at all if the Gammel support were withdrawn? At forty-five he had nothing like the confidence that had distinguished him at twenty-eight.

"I think—I think very few men would have got on like you have, dear," came Rose's voice out of the darkness.

"Probably not. Still, there's the future. What with keeping up appearances, and two children to educate instead of one, I've saved very little money in all these years. We should have been better off without Edgar."

The callous observation smote Rose's tender heart. It seemed to her sometimes that Martin blamed her for having brought twins into the world. This was not

the first time he had implied that one of them was superfluous. Sometimes it was Dorothy, but more often Edgar. Martin and Edgar were antagonistic by temperament. In disposition the boy was remarkably like Aunt Polly. He had her direct, blunt manner, and occasionally evinced flashes of sardonic humor, curiously reminiscent of her sharp tongue. That was probably the reason why he and his father were sometimes at variance. Martin had no patience with people who showed a sense of humor. It seemed to him that they utterly failed to appreciate the seriousness of life, and that their laughter was a personal affront. Dorothy too, with her high spirits, often disconcerted him.

"By the way," he said, "this will be Edgar's last term at school. I shall soon have to be thinking what to do with him."

Rose sat up in bed.

"You won't put him in 'Rosalia,' will you?"

"Not sure."

"B-because he won't like it."

Martin said nothing. He sometimes made it extremely difficult for Rose to pursue a subject.

"Have you any special plans for our boy?" she asked timidly.

"Business of some sort. I don't much care what. Something that pays."

Under the bed-clothes Rose clasped and unclasped her hands. "Martin dear," she said, "he's set his heart on something so different. He wants to learn to fly."

Martin grunted. "I hope you discouraged such nonsense."

"I did at first. But not lately. He's really made up his mind."

"Has he?" said Martin sententiously.

"But you'll listen to what he has to say about it, won't you, dear?"

"Children nowadays are allowed to say a great deal too much. You know, I often think we should have done better without any. One has to devote a great deal of thought to their future, which would be much better employed if concentrated on one's own. The only people who benefit by having children are the really poor. When they get too old to work their children are earning a living and able to keep them."

"Oh, dear!" Rose demurred. "But one only wants to love one's children, not to benefit by them."

"You women always ignore the economic side of things," he objected. "I'm not saying I don't love our children, in spite of the fact that they've turned out so unlike either of us. I wonder they didn't wait up for us to-night. Did they go to bed early?"

"I—I haven't been to see," Rose faltered. She was very much afraid that the twins were not in yet.

For once in a way Martin was not curious enough to pursue the subject. He wanted to turn over and compose himself for sleep.

"Good-night," he yawned.

"God bless you, sweetheart." Rose never closed her eyes without that formula.

A touch of indigestion, due to the good dinner to which he had done full justice, tended to keep Martin awake. In the darkness he began reviewing his parliamentary position. It was somewhat disturbing. Without undue exercise of foresight it was apparent to him that a dissolution was not very remote. The trend of popular feeling was against the Government. Gradual

estrangement from the Gammel party made him realize that Hemford was no longer to be counted on as a safe seat. Once defeated there he might remain in "the wilderness" for an indefinite period. That would mean the loss of £400 a year, the chief adjunct to his income. How he would do without it he did not know. To reduce his expenses, move into a smaller house, curtail allowances to Rose and the children, do with one servant, give up the many little amenities of life to which he had become accustomed—all such changes would be a trying reflection on his new rank. The prospect of having to make them stabbed his stiff-necked vanity. In the black stillness of the night his somnolent brain became the prey of that supersensitiveness that eats into and tortures the spirit.

Rose could not settle herself to sleep either. She was hungry. At a dinner party or banquet her appetite invariably failed her. She found it impossible to maintain a running conversation and consume her food at the same time. Moreover, her evening dresses were always too tight for comfort. As a result she only made a pretense of eating.

Lying there wide-eyed it was not long before her thoughts went to the twins. She wondered whether they were hungry too. Coming in late, they might be. She wanted to assure herself of their well-being. A motherly longing to go and "tuck them up" besieged her. Although she had long given up the fond habit to-night she yearned to revive it. It was their birthday night too; and although it was certain they had enjoyed themselves, she felt something like self-reproach for being the cause of their seeking entertainment away from their own home. She felt she ought to have stayed

in on such an occasion; a few friends ought to have been asked in; there should have been something in the nature of a jolly birthday supper. . . .

Presently, when Martin's even breathing told her that he was asleep, she slipped out of bed, put on her dressing-gown and slippers, and tiptoed out of the room. On the landing she lit a candle and proceeded to Dorothy's room. Finding it empty, she went on to Edgar's. That was empty too. They were really very late. And she had wanted to kiss them so badly. All she could do in their absence was to console herself by pressing her lips to the pillows where their dear heads would rest. Then she went downstairs to get a biscuit. She was so hungry that she could think of nothing but to-morrow's breakfast.

A pencil of light coming from beneath the kitchen door caught her eye as she was about to turn into the dining-room. Simultaneously her nostrils were assailed by the appetizing smell of hot bacon. Rose went into the kitchen.

At the table sat the twins, between them a big plate of eggs and bacon. More bacon was cooking on the gas stove.

"Oh, mother, do have some!" they chorused. "You've no idea how delicious eggs and bacon taste at this time of night!"

Poor Rose! The temptation of this feast as against a dry biscuit was irresistible. The twins read capitulation in her face. In another minute they had her sitting at the table and were helping her to curly bacon, crisp from the frying-pan.

"It only wanted mother to come in to make it perfect!" Dorothy declared.

"Rather!" agreed the boy. "Mums, what are you going to drink? 'Rosalia' or some of our 'Monsters'? We brought in two with us. With all due deference to the governor we didn't like the idea of undermining our constitutions with 'Rosalia' so late as this."

In all her life Rose had never enjoyed a meal so much as this stolen midnight feast with her two children. The only thing that marred her pleasure was the certainty that if Martin could see her sitting there "guzzling" (Edgar's expression) eggs and bacon in a dressing-gown with her hair flowing all over her shoulders he would consider her totally lacking in dignity. But as the merry meal progressed she forgot all about dignity. She felt young and happy and—yes, irresponsible. "Monsters" made her positively effervesce. Egged on by the twins she gave them imitations of some of the speeches made by ponderous bores at the banquet from which she had returned so empty. She had a certain gift for mimicry.

Upstairs Martin had fallen into a troubled sleep. Soon this developed into nightmare, brought on by indigestion. He dreamt that the pursuivants of the Heralds' College had got him down in one of the vaults beneath the House of Commons and were torturing him in the most approved medieval fashion. They were "putting the question," not in customary parliamentary language, but with the assistance of molten lead. Rouge Dragon poured the fiery metal over his bare chest; Portcullis scorched him with a blowpipe. They demanded to know what he, a small plumber's son, meant by his audacity in considering himself worthy of the honor of knighthood and the privilege of bearing arms. They hammered his joints with a shaping mallet as if he were a length

of compo piping full of bends. With hot irons they seared his flesh, explaining it as the operation of "blazoning his coat." They called him a false knight, and then put out their torches and left him in the dark. It took him several minutes to throw off the horrible obsession, to know where he was, and to discover that Rose was no longer by his side.

He called her. Getting no answer, he scrambled out of bed and bent over the banisters, listening. Hearing sounds from the lower floor, he went cautiously downstairs. The sounds led him to the kitchen. The door, slightly ajar, permitted him to witness the dumbfounding spectacle within. He saw Rose, his wife, the mother of his children, at dead of night, sitting at a common kitchen table drinking something out of a kitchen tumbler that was certainly not "Rosalia," and larking—yes, there was no other word for it—positively larking with the twins! The monstrous sight reminded him of her indiscretion of years ago in sitting down to dinner with Jane. He felt deceived, set at nought in his own house. He stood trying to keep his anger within bounds, mentally revolving the most scathing reproof he could employ. Even in anger he knew the value of an effective opening sentence. "*You, Rose!*" in the cold tone which she so dreaded, would probably meet the case and bring the trio to their senses—Rose ashamed, Edgar and Dorothy speechless with fear of the consequences. As he put his hand out to push open the door Edgar rapped on the bare table with his knife-handle.

"And now," he declaimed in imitation of the tone of a toastmaster, "I call on Lady Leffley to return thanks on behalf of the ladies. Applause!"

"Hear, hear! Cheers!" Dorothy seconded, joining in with her knife-handle.

"Go on, mother, you must," Edgar insisted.

Rose stood up bashfully, gathering her dressing-gown around her.

"Oh, children!" she protested, "I'm no good at making speeches. I can't do anything properly except love. But I will say this: I *have* so enjoyed supper with you to-night, although I ought to know better at my age. I really was hungry, or I couldn't have managed three slices of bacon and two eggs and a glass and a half of 'Monster' as well. We ought to have drunk 'Rosalia.' But I won't say anything more about that, as it's your birthday. Now, darlings, we must really go to bed. But before we do just let me remind you, and I'm serious now, that for all we have and for all we are, we've got to thank Daddy. If it were not for all he has done for us we should be in a very different position to what we are now; and if you're ever inclined to be ungrateful or discontented you must try and remember that. He's the very best husband and the dearest father in the world and—what was that?"

"Only a mouse," said Edgar. "Hear, hear!"

"I thought I heard footsteps," said Rose, going nervously to the door.

But when she opened it, nobody was there. Martin had crept silently away.

XXIII

EDGAR

MOST people reason from the general to the particular. Martin had too much of the Ego in him to do that. A German proverb has it, "Der Esel fängt immer mit Mir an," but though a keen admirer of everything German he probably was not acquainted with it nor aware how very symbolic it was of his attitude towards the rest of the world.

Since he had been able to reason at all he had always done so from the particular to the general; in other words, from himself outwards. He took it for granted that any course of action or system of ideas of which he approved must of necessity appeal to other people. This was not entirely due to vanity. He really believed in his own judgment. He might admit the capacity of men of proved ability, admire the eloquence of some, the administrative genius of others—there were men on his side of the House who had his distinct approval—but he reckoned himself the intellectual equal of any of them. To put it concisely Martin was a bounder, and he did not know it.

At home he ruled in the spirit of bounderism. He did not know he was an unnatural parent. Had he been told so he would have retorted that he had unnatural children. He considered them assertive and much too independent. He hardly thought of them as

creatures with personalities and souls of their own. In his eyes they had no value, just as Rose had no particular value, except as a wife and a housekeeper. In fact, he thought of children as unavoidable evils entailing regrettable expense. That the twins should show a desire for individual expression and a need for individual consideration struck him as preposterous. As babies they had neither amused nor interested him; as they grew up habit made him tolerate them. Of the two, because of her good looks, he had least objection to Dorothy; but he disapproved of her high spirits and her ready tongue. The latter reminded him unpleasantly of Aunt Polly.

Another thing he discouraged in her was a hankering for art. While she was at school he had been persuaded to allow her special instruction, but when she shook free from the freehand stage and developed a startling facility for caricature he put his foot down. He had himself been wickedly caricatured at one of the Hemford elections, and he was not going to foster so pernicious a faculty in his own daughter. So the drawing lessons had abruptly ceased. In place of them Dorothy was now learning (and loathing) shorthand and typewriting—in Martin's opinion sensible accomplishments which had a definite value.

Edgar's case was different. At present he was at one of the big London day-schools which call themselves colleges. All Martin's past talk—almost forgotten now—about a university education for "the people" had resulted in nothing better than this. Seventeen years of Parliament had not brought him an inch nearer to the upper classes. He hated them more than ever, writhed under their aloofness and cool disregard of the existence of men like himself. Edgar was the sufferer. His

father's class hatred had defrauded him of the advantages of mixing with the sons of gentlemen. Now his schooldays were drawing to an end. He would have to be started in some career. That meant more expenditure. Martin's face hardened whenever he thought of it.

So, when, one day about this time, he called Edgar into his study, his main idea was to settle the boy's future as quickly and as cheaply as possible. Rose had given Edgar a hint of the coming interview, and in her endeavors to make him amenable to whatever Martin should deem best only succeeded in putting him on his guard. For Edgar secretly dreaded his father. The intuition of youth had created this feeling. He could not explain why he felt it. All he knew was that it was there. He showed it ever so slightly by a sort of expressionless density—the schoolboy's mask of feeling—when he came into the room.

Martin was seated in a revolving chair at his desk. Edgar kept near the door. Hot and disheveled after a bicycle ride, he felt at a disadvantage. He noticed that his father looked authoritative and calmly dispassionate. It was not *his* future he was going to settle, but somebody else's. He could keep *his* hair on.

"You look warm," Martin observed. "Very soon now you won't have so much time for bicycling and games. You are leaving school at the end of this term. You know that, of course."

"Yes, father."

"I understand that you've done fairly well there. I hope you appreciate that I have spent a great deal on your education. I also hope you will profit by it."

Edgar offered no remark to this preamble. It made him nervous. He wished his father would "cut the

cackle and come to the 'osses," a phrase he had picked up from a sporting novel, read surreptitiously.

"Because," Martin pursued, "your future greatly depends on the use you make of your educational advantages. It's your future that I want to speak about. I intend to give you a good start in life."

"Thank you, father." Immediately after that tribute of prescribed filial respect, Edgar blurted out: "I—I'd like to tell you what it is I want to——"

Martin's uplifted hand stopped the rush of words.

"Fortunately I can give you a choice of careers. As a director of 'Rosalia, Limited,' I can get you a position in Grimwood Brothers, or into any of the Liversidge stores, provided you pass the necessary examination. Alternatively, I could probably secure an opening for you with Sir Alfred Gammel, or I might even put you into the antique trade. You can think it over and let me know which you prefer. It should be obvious to you that with application and assiduity on your part, and helped by the influence I shall be able to exercise on your behalf, it will be your own fault if you don't get on. That's all I want to say."

He picked up a pen to show that the interview was ended. Edgar fidgeted with his feet.

"That's all, my boy," Martin reiterated.

Edgar took a step forward. "It's no good, father," he said. "I needn't think it over. I can tell you now. I don't want to go into any of those things. I shouldn't be any good at them, and—and I've got reasons for wanting to do something else."

"Indeed!" Martin laid down his pen. "To save time, perhaps you'll be good enough to let me hear your

objections to *my* proposals. To Grimwoods', for instance."

"Oh, now you're asking for it! It doesn't interest me—mineral waters and all that. And I don't like 'Rosalia'—the taste, I mean. I prefer beer."

The indiscreet admission was out before the boy knew it. Its effect on Martin was stupefying. He went white with indignation.

"Do you know what you are saying?" he demanded. "You admit to being a beer drinker! You—my son—brought up to the strictest temperance!"

"I never said I was a beer drinker," protested Edgar sullenly. "I only said I liked it better than 'Rosalia.' I've tasted it twice, that's all. What I meant to say, only it's so difficult, is that it wouldn't be cricket to go into a temperance trade like that when I think there's no harm in beer. It—it would be against my convictions."

He thought the use of the last word, a favorite one with his father, would have a propitiatory effect. Instead, it increased Martin's ire. To hear it used in connection with beer sounded to his ears almost sacrilegious.

"I'm afraid you don't appreciate the value of words," he said cuttingly. "And I don't propose to argue the question of sobriety with you. We'll turn to the drug trade. Have you anything against that?"

The contemptuous tone set Edgar's blood simmering.

"Certainly. Drugs stink. And as for the antique trade—well, I daresay it's all right, but it's not what I'm interested in. You've got to be interested in a thing to get on in it. I want to be an aviator. I know a bit about mechanics, and I'm dead keen. I want to

learn from the very beginning, and it doesn't cost much. Not much, that is, if you go through the works and don't mind mucking yourself. I shouldn't. I should be learning all the time."

"You might moderate your language."

"I beg your pardon, father, but I'm so dead keen. I don't know how to tell you how keen. I've always wanted to be an engineer, and especially an aviator. Mother knows. I'd really slog at it. Do let me! I'd be grateful to you. I—I can't tell you how keen I really am," he finished urgently.

"Your vocabulary seems rather limited. I can comprehend that you are 'keen,' as you call it, without your using the unsuitable word so many times."

That was all Martin's dignity allowed him to vouchsafe. He picked up his pen again, expecting Edgar to take the hint and go. But Edgar stood his ground.

"What do you say, father?"

Martin looked up, his face full of simulated incomprehension.

"About—about flying," pleaded Edgar.

"Oh, that! If you were a rich man's son there might be nothing against it. You will have to make your own way in the world. There's no money to be made at flying, only in teaching other people to fly. It would be another matter if you showed strong commercial instincts of the Grahame White order, for example. He, I understand, was wise enough to apply himself to the commercial side of aviation while the thing was in its infancy. As a consequence he has got on. But I don't think you have ability of that sort. I don't suppose you have enough commercial instinct to draft the simplest of advertisements. You see, I'm not altogether

uninformed about aviation. There would be nothing in it for you. . . . I'm busy now."

He turned again to his desk. Disappointed and disgusted, Edgar went slowly out of the room.

Left alone, Martin no longer feigned interest in the papers on his desk. He sat staring before him, savagely chewing the end of his pen. At that moment he found himself actually disliking his son. When Edgar had said that he liked beer Martin had involuntarily conjured up a vision of the defunct Peacock—Peacock who had also been offensive about "Rosalia." Edgar, too, had shown some of his great-aunt's assertiveness. That was quite enough to make Martin put his foot down about flying. Rose had probably encouraged the boy. Rose was so weak where Edgar was concerned.

Rose tapped quietly at Edgar's bedroom door. She had heard him go there after leaving the study. No sound came from within. She tried the handle. It would not give.

"You can't come in," said a stifled voice.

"It's only me, darling," she pleaded.

Then the door was unlocked. Edgar, looking suspiciously bright-eyed, had evidently just risen from the bed where he had flung himself.

"It's n-no good!" he choked. "I knew it wouldn't be. What an ass I am!"

He hid his face on his mother's shoulder till the weakness he was ashamed of had passed. It did a fellow good to have a mother like her. She made up for two fathers. A fellow could tell her things. She didn't ask questions. She understood. She was dead against his flying, herself, because she thought it was dangerous

and he might hurt himself, but she knew how awfully keen he was; and when a fellow is simply dead keen—— Oh, she was a ripping mother!

A little later on Martin sought Rose. His face was extremely grave. He knew exactly how to strike the right note in her, knew perfectly well that she studied every variation in his expression, and that for the rest of the day she would be influenced by the mood she read there. So now he wore the look of a man laboring under the stress of deep parental disappointment.

"I think it as well to tell you," he said, "that Edgar and I have had our talk. At least, he did most of the talking. He has shown himself willful and obstinate. I'm very worried about him. And morally, too, I fear for him. We shall have to keep a very strict watch over him. He has, unwittingly perhaps, revealed things to me this afternoon which indicate only too clearly that he cannot lay claim, as we have hoped and believed, to the white flower of a blameless youth."

Edgar's aspersion of "Rosalie" and his suspicious preference for beer were responsible for this highly colored statement.

"Oh, dear, whatever has he done?" Rose asked fearfully.

"That I cannot discuss with his mother. Only mark this, Rose: Edgar is not so young nor so innocent as you would believe."

Rose could not in the least make out what he was driving at. But it sounded mysterious and alarming, and so unlike anything she could associate with her boy. For a moment she felt inclined to doubt Martin's judgment of him. For the Edgar she had so recently

come from, who had wept on her breast, had shown her the clean and simple heart of a boy.

"Are you—quite sure you understand him?" she faltered. "He's difficult to understand sometimes."

Martin's smile was very kind and very superior.

"When a man has made the study of character as closely as I have," he said, "it is unlikely that he can be mistaken in his own son. But that's neither here nor there. The point is that Edgar has got to go into business, and that I will not be coerced by any silly boyish predilections. I want you as well as him to understand that from now onwards the subject of his future career is settled and closed."

For once Rose did not answer with her customary submissiveness. In fact, she said nothing until Martin asked her if she had heard. Then she raised her eyes to his, and Martin's shifted under her clear, direct gaze.

"I heard," she said quietly, "and I'll not take sides with Edgar, if that's what you mean. But I can't treat him any differently because whatever he did—and I can't feel he has done anything so very wrong—I should love him just the same. He's my son." She made the words sing.

"Emotional creatures, women," thought Martin, turning away.

XXIV

PLAIN MARY PEACOCK

TIME had not quarreled with Mrs. Peacock. After ten years of widowhood her age seemed as doubtful as ever. Neither Rose nor the twins troubled to estimate it. She had always been old to them and now was very old, that was all. Martin, being prejudiced, thought her too old to be alive.

Except in years the change in her was hardly noticeable. She was as sharp-witted and as alert as ever. After giving up her shop and burying Peacock, both of which proceedings she carried out with the same impartial conscientiousness, she paid more attention to her appearance. She cultivated more tidiness and wore better clothes. The only feature reminiscent of the past was her black bonnet, but that had improved in quality and was always festooned with crape, presumably in memory of her late husband.

For the sake of occupation she still carried on a little business in antiques and ladies' cast-off apparel, using her front room as a miniature showroom. The antiques were few and select—some Georgian silver, bits of jewelry, old lace, a few pictures. The dresses and accessories were of fine quality and finish. This semi-private trade was by no means unprofitable, and in addition it gave her an impish satisfaction. She knew that it made Martin squirm to think that, in spite of his social eleva-

tion, he had an aunt who was only an old-clo' woman, and who would remain one until the end of her days.

This afternoon Aunt Polly was expecting the twins to tea. The feast was already laid in her sitting-room at the back. Cold fried fish, crisp and golden, was its central attraction. A dish of spring onions and another of new bread and butter flanked the fish. A big birthday cake, iced and decorated, dominated the board. The tea-kettle was in readiness on a spirit lamp, and a jug of thick cream stood in the slop basin. It was the last word in teas, specially provided for the twins. At home spring onions were vetoed; the fish of commerce, cooked in an odoriferous shop round the corner, would have staggered the respectability of "Tivoli"; cream there was a Sunday luxury. Hence it was that tea at Aunt Polly's always took on the aspect of a stolen orgy. She herself gloried in providing it. The only drawback to her satisfaction in doing so was Martin's inability to see the gusto with which the twins tucked into it.

At four o'clock she was at her front door watching the trams that passed the corner. When one stopped, and she saw the twins climbing down from the roof, she waved demonstrative greetings until they got to the house. In the passage she kissed them boisterously, and then from a capacious pocket produced their birthday presents, two small packets done up in paper. Dorothy was delighted with hers, a little seed-pearl brooch from the front-room stock. Edgar's was a gold signet ring with a crest on it.

"Why, it's a peacock!" he exclaimed when he had thanked her.

"Of course. It's poor Peacock's very own crest. Didn't you know he come of a very old family? He

used to wear that ring when it wasn't left in pledge at 'The Feathers.' Fits you nicely, don't it? Well, how's things at home, now you're all so high up in the world?"

"Oh, everything's the same," answered Dorothy; "only we don't get mother to ourselves so much."

"If she's not at banquets with the governor she's always on committees or opening bazaars," Edgar complained. "She looks awfully tired sometimes; but I believe she'd go on till she dropped."

"Same as poor Peacock. *He* used to go on till he dropped—outside 'The Feathers' mostly. As long as he was there he was happy; and as long as your mother's with Martin or doin' anything for him, she's happy too. Drinkin' too much or lovin' too much is a kind of disease. I don't see much difference myself."

The twins let it go at that. They had not come for metaphysics, but what they called a "blow-out." When they had had it they found plenty of news of their own to talk about. Aunt Polly liked them to air their grievances, especially when Martin was the cause of them. She harbored similar ones of her own against him, and understood theirs. That was what made her such a sympathetic listener, so different to their mother. Whenever the twins opened their hearts to Rose on the subject of their father they had an uncomfortable feeling that they were making her unhappy. With Aunt Polly it seemed to have the reverse effect.

It was not long before Aunt Polly had heard all about Martin's obstructive attitude towards Edgar's dearest project, and the way he was coercing Dorothy to master shorthand and typewriting instead of art.

"We wouldn't mind so much," the girl explained, "if he would only give us reasons why we can't have

the things we've set our hearts on. It makes us feel as if he doesn't care, really."

"What does your mother say?" asked Aunt Polly, without committing herself to any opinion.

"Oh, she's a brick," Edgar declared. "She's always putting little things right for us, only she can't dictate about the big ones like flying or art. She hasn't the dibs, you see. Father pays the piper."

"Huh! There's others can call the tune as well as him!"

After that restrained comment Aunt Polly became unusually thoughtful. The twins couldn't make her out. She interrupted Edgar's description of a recent cricket match in which he had distinguished himself, and again when Dorothy was rhapsodizing about a new muslin dress in process of home manufacture, with some close questioning about flying and art and where such accomplishments could be best learned. Of course the twins had all the necessary information at their fingers' ends, and she absorbed it with her usual quickness.

"I've a good mind to help you meself," she presently observed. "Only if I did, what's to stop your father knowin'? It wouldn't even do to tell your mother."

The twins exchanged startled glances. Quite apart from the underhandedness of such a proceeding they were at a loss to understand how Aunt Polly could afford the expense. Unlike Martin, they had never speculated about her means.

"Oh, but aunt, dear, it would cost too much," Dorothy objected. "I daresay even father would find it too expensive for the two of us."

"What your father can or can't afford hasn't nothing to do with me. My house don't cost eighty pounds a

year and taxes. I don't keep three servants and live swanky. I'm plain Mary Peacock, but I'm worth more than my clothes. I look at it this way. I don't want to put the young against their parents, but when one of 'em won't do what he ought he's either got to be made or shown how."

"Oh, I'm sure father means awfully well and all that," argued Edgar, trying hard to be loyal. "I dare say he thinks it's us who are ungrateful."

Aunt Polly took no notice of this half-hearted attempt at a charitable view of the matter. She put her elbows on the table and, supporting her chin in her hands, sat thinking. Like a gargoyle, Dorothy thought she looked, and itched to make a sketch of the impish old face.

"Of course if I learnt you to fly," she went on dubiously, "you might come to an end sudden; and then if they knew—Martin and Rose—that I'd had a hand in it they'd say I done it on purpose."

"Edgar wouldn't smash himself up," was Dorothy's confident assertion. "His nerves are like steel."

"I don't know about that," disclaimed Edgar modestly. "But I'm not afraid, and I'd love it. The worst of it is I can't prove that flying's my line until I've learnt how. Dorothy's only got to pick up a pencil and show what she can do. Look at this, Aunt Polly."

He took a half-sheet of paper out of his pocket-book and passed it across the table. Ostensibly it was a serious pencil portrait of Martin, but in making it Dorothy had unconsciously allowed all her talent for caricature full play. A gurgle of amusement came from Aunt Polly as she looked at it.

"Well, I never! You have hit him off and no mis-

take! A regular sketch! Just like them comic things in the illustrateds!"

"It's only a study for a proper portrait," said Dorothy with becoming modesty. "You can keep it if you like."

Aunt Polly precipitately passed it back.

"Now let's get talkin'," she said.

XXV

HARRIS

SIR ALFRED GAMMEL had not been far out when he gave it as his opinion that Martin ought to have been in business instead of politics. Politics *was* a business to him. He did not think of it as the science of government. Its catchwords, its rant and its shibboleths were merely the parallels of trade technicalities and jargon. In short, he only thought of politics in simple terms of pounds, shillings and pence.

In spirit he was a small trader. He would have liked to deal in politics over the counter by the pound; and he would have given short weight. Had he not been lucky enough to get into Parliament his factious nature might have made a demagogue of him, not because of any sympathy with the masses, but because he had seen that by windy speech and altruistic verbiage money was to be made out of them. The unscrupulousness that permitted him to flatter the mob would have been of equal value to him in defrauding a customer in a shop.

There was something about a shop that had a great fascination for Martin. Very few people know the trade price of general commodities; none can be sure of the cost of anything of unsettled value. Who, for instance, is to decide what a picture or a work of art is worth? It would depend on what you liked to ask for it or what the purchaser would give. Martin had learnt that

lesson at Aunt Polly's. Behind a counter his predatory instincts would have had full play. Unfortunately, as a member of Parliament and the Order of Knighthood he would have felt it beneath him to go into retail trade. But Edgar could. And if he provided the money to set Edgar up it would mean that he himself would, to all intents and purposes, run the business and take the profits.

That was what made him think of Harris. Harris called himself a marine-store dealer, but he dealt in antiques in a small way as well. He was a Jew, with the perception of his race for better things than scrap iron and broken metal; but being a Jew he did not disdain to earn the better part of his living out of such-like waste products. Martin, who liked poking about the Caledonian Market and the small shops of men like Harris, looking for bargains, had bought things from him: bits of brasswork, pewter, Japanese tsubas. He had got them cheap because Harris, having a wife and young family to keep and very little capital, believed in small profits and quick returns. In thinking of him as a likely man with whom Edgar might be started in business Martin saw security in Harris's wife and family. The possession of these gives a man a certain stability. He isn't here to-day and gone to-morrow. In Jews, moreover, the domestic virtues are known to be strongly developed. Jews were a sober race and good at business. Altogether, Harris seemed just the man to suit him.

Quite casually he made his proposal over the purchase of a pair of plated candlesticks.

"Are these old?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Harris; "copies, I reckon."

"How do you know the difference?"

"By the feel. The *feel* of the silver isn't solid enough for old Sheffield plate."

Martin knew the text-book test of old plate—the separate skin of silver over the copper—but like most amateurs he didn't know how to apply it. He could also talk glibly about hard and soft paste china and the feel of it under the glaze; but it was only talk. Now, when he was told that old plate could be recognized by the feel, he was no wiser than before.

"With your knowledge why don't you confine yourself to the trade in antiques?" he asked.

"All very well, Sir Martin, but how about capital? You want money for antiques, and a shop in the right quarter."

"What amount could a man start on?"

"Depends on the man. I know what I could start on, only I haven't got it."

"Would a couple of hundred be enough?"

"For me, it would, because I should go for a quick turnover."

"And your stock would be small, of course."

"It'd have to be, unless I got it on commission from one of the big houses. You can always make a show that way, you know."

"Of course there are fakes," Martin observed in a pensive tone that was all innocence on the surface. "I suppose there are big profits in fakes?"

"Yes, but I don't hold with that sort of trade. It gives you a bad name. It doesn't lead to anything; not regular custom, I mean."

"Quite so. I only mentioned it incidentally." Martin leant against the counter in the leisurely attitude of one who is ready for a chat. "It's extraordinary how

cleverly things are copied nowadays—porcelain, Sheffield plate, prints, pictures—everything in fact. I suppose even the trade get taken in sometimes!”

Harris shook his head. “Only if they want to be. You see, it’s like this, Sir Martin. We know where the fakes come from.” He mentioned the names of three wholesale firms. “Their travelers are always coming round pestering us to do business with them. Now, if you buy at auction or a private sale you know more or less that you’re getting genuine articles. You’ve got to use discretion, of course. Sometimes even then you get taken in. But there’s a difference between selling a doubtful article in good faith and laying in a stock of duds with your eyes open.”

Martin showed himself to be in complete accord with that view. Indeed, for a minute or two he enlarged on the subject of trade morality. But while he talked he made brief notes in a pocket-book. They consisted of three names—the wholesale houses which Harris had mentioned, and the memo, “Look up addresses in the P.O. Directory.” Then he harked back to Harris’s admission of want of capital.

“Then if you could afford it you would like to confine yourself to the antique trade?”

“I could do all right at it. Not here, of course. One day, perhaps, I shall be able to give up the marine-store business and open a small shop in the West End.”

“I would like to help you,” Martin said cautiously. “I’m not a rich man, and I couldn’t afford to speculate, but I might be able to find a couple of hundred or so.”

“Do you mean that—firm, Sir Martin? A partnership?”

Martin made an airy gesture. He didn’t want Harris

to see that he was trying to engineer a business deal, and he was equally anxious that his motive should not be misconstrued as a philanthropic one.

"Yes. Not exactly a partnership, though. I couldn't possibly have my name appear in the matter. And then, again, I'm not a business man."

"No, sir, of course not. At least——"

"Still"—Martin smiled the bland smile of the man who wishes to make it clear that he is not entirely uninformed—"still, I think I ought to be secured in some way. What would you suggest?"

"There'd be the stock, and the joint signature to checks," Harris began meditatively.

"It wouldn't do for me to sign checks." After a thoughtful pause Martin continued: "Now, if I could prevail on my son to go into the business and represent my interests in it, it would simplify matters. I don't know, though. He's rather—keen"—this time his smile was peculiar—"on starting under my friend, Sir Alfred Gammel."

"Well, Sir Martin, I don't mind which way it is. I'd be pleased enough to be associated with any son of yours. In fact, I'd consider it an honor."

That was all Martin wanted. It only remained to bind Harris down to terms.

"I don't know that it mightn't be best for him," he said. "He's very interested in antiques. Now, supposing he's agreeable, and I think we may take it that he will be, how about the 'terms of reference,' as we say in parliamentary circles?" he added jocularly.

They did not take long to settle. Harris showed himself agreeable to nearly everything that was proposed, and Martin took advantage of his docility to drive as

hard a bargain as he could. It was so easy for him to imply that a man of his social position was bound to be ignorant of commercial affairs. Harris felt unequal to haggling with a member of Parliament and a gentleman of title. An honest man himself, he attributed complete honesty to Martin.

"Then we'll consider it settled," said Martin in conclusion. "I'll let you hear from me." He laughed genially as he prepared to leave the shop. "Business is a terrible strain. I wish I understood it better. Good-day to you."

XXVI

DOMESTIC ECONOMY

IT'S my belief there's going to be changes," observed the housemaid, perspicaciously, as she came into the kitchen.

Jane, counting forks and spoons into the plate-basket, heard but did not look up. She was too old and tried a servant to show curiosity, although it was quite clear from Ada's tone that she was referring to something she had heard "upstairs." Twenty years of service with her present employers were behind Jane. She never forgot that she was the first maid Mrs. Leffley ever had. But the cook, comparatively a newcomer to "Tivoli," pricked up her ears.

"What makes you say that?" she asked.

"I went into my lady's room to dust under the sofa which I'd forgot, and she was there with Sir Martin, and I'll swear she'd been crying. What I heard was: 'Oh, Martin, not Jane!'"

Jane could not ignore this deliberate allusion to herself. The color came into her face and then left it.

"Tales!" she exclaimed contemptuously.

"Well, something's going to happen," the girl went on; "and it's to do with economy. I heard them say that too."

"That would be nothing new," scoffed the cook. "I've heard nothing else except economy ever since I took on

here. Thought I was going to get into a high-class family when I came, and instead of that it's not much different from my first place with people who'd made their money in the shoe trade. Jumped up nobodies, I call these Leffleys."

"I don't like to hear her ladyship spoken of like that," objected Jane quietly.

"Oh, she's all right," conceded cook. "Only she's too soft. With her it's always Sir Martin says this and Sir Martin says that, or Sir Martin can't understand how the milk bill's so high, or Sir Martin don't like calves' head done that way, until I'm fair sick."

A thoughtful look had come into Ada's face. "I've got nothing to say against Sir Martin except that he watches you in a funny sort of way. But he gave me half a crown last week to buy myself something with."

The cook shot a quick glance at the girl. "You shouldn't have took it. Tips at Christmas is all right for gentlemen, but otherwise not promiscuous-like, unless he's a visitor. I shouldn't have thought it of Sir Martin."

"You're making a lot of talk about nothing," said Ada airily. "There goes the bell."

Jane got up. "It's for me," she said quietly. But her face was troubled as she shut the kitchen door behind her. The housemaid's words had filled her with vague foreboding.

While the servants talked in the kitchen Rose, upstairs, was trying hard to break down her husband's obduracy.

"It's like turning away an old friend," she said sadly.

"Rubbish! Who ever heard of a servant being considered as a friend?"

"I do when I think of Jane going. I can't help it. I know old families do too. They sometimes put it in the papers when their old servants die."

"Well, we're a new family. And anyhow, Jane isn't dead. Why we should consider her I can't see. If you reckon it up we've paid her hundreds of pounds while she's been with us."

"Twenty years!" murmured Rose.

"Twenty, is it? H'm." Martin made a mental calculation. "Then she's had at least four hundred. Most of it, I expect, is in the savings bank. There's her interest on it too."

"Twenty years of devoted service. Think of it, Martin. All these years willing and hard-working and never a fault to find with her!"

Martin's shoulders went up. "I thought we were agreed that with the expense I'm incurring for Edgar a saving has to be made somewhere."

"Yes, I know. But let me try and do it out of the housekeeping. I'd do anything rather——"

"You know very well you can't economize more than you do on the housekeeping. There's absolutely no other way of cutting expenses except by getting rid of a superfluous servant. Jane is superfluous. She's getting old. And to be quite frank with you, Rose, it's very inadvisable for us in our present position to retain a servant who knew us in our smaller days."

It was at this juncture that Rose had rung the bell. She did it with very great reluctance. She did not agree with any of Martin's arguments, the last one least of all.

"You'd better go," was all she said. "I can say it best alone with her. And as it's you who want Ada in Jane's place you'd better arrange that part."

"Just as you like. I don't expect any difficulty with Ada. She won't refuse a rise of two pounds in her wages."

Martin left the room as Jane reached the door. He did not look at her as he passed out. She noticed that. It helped to prepare her for what was coming.

"You rang, my lady?" she asked.

"Yes, Jane." Rose had to moisten her lips. They were trembling. "I've something very difficult to say. I can't bear to say it. But—but Sir Martin—that is, we have decided that we must only keep two servants—and that means I—I've got to give you notice."

Jane stood quite still, quite silent. Suddenly she burst into tears. This was too much for Rose. Her own eyes filled and overflowed. Impulsively she went up to Jane and took her two hands.

"Oh, Jane!" she sobbed. "You know I wouldn't let you go if I could help it. Please believe that—though I don't see how you can. I've done my very best to put it off. It's not me. It'll be dreadful without you. But—don't you understand?—I can't help it!"

It cost her a struggle to make the admission. It meant acknowledging that Martin was responsible for a proceeding of which she disapproved; that she was in opposition to him. She had never done such a thing before. She felt a traitor. Jane did not mistake her. Although no name had been mentioned Martin's implication in the dreadful decision was clear to her.

"Yes, my lady," she gulped. "And—and I'd never think hard of you. You're the best mistress any one

could have. But, oh, not to be wanted after all these years!"

The two women stood blinking at one another through a mist of tears. Their thoughts were back in the days when the class distinction between them had been almost inappreciable. They were both of the servant class. Rank and comparative wealth on the one side, long years of service on the other, had not altered their natures nor lessened the innate link of caste. All that was in Rose's mind. In friendship as well as in justice to Jane she did not hesitate to speak what was in it. She pleaded a case of necessity. If she unduly used Edgar's future to point her argument it was Martin's fault. She really believed that to meet the new expense some drastic economy had to be made. All that was left for her to do was to sympathize with the victim of it. She faltered over it.

"Please, my lady, don't say any more," Jane begged at last. "I know what you mean. It hurts me to hear you having to make excuses. I'm ready to go whenever you want me to; and if I might come and see you sometimes——"

"As often as you like, Jane. And I hope you'll get a better place than this. And"—Rose had quite forgotten Martin's strictures on class differences—"always count on me for your friend."

"That's for you, Ada," said cook, looking at the bell indicator. "Sir Martin's study. Wonder if it's got to do with what Jane's been sent for."

"I'll tell you when I come back," replied Ada. "Is my cap on straight?"

"Yes; but don't go setting it at Sir Martin or you might have to 'throw it over the windmill.'"

"Windmill! What's that mean?"

"Why, that there's always danger when there's men about. I wouldn't trust none of them, old or young, married or single."

But cook, as Ada knew, had been "disappointed in love," and being over thirty was something of a misogynist.

"I don't believe in being suspicious of everybody," said the girl as she went off to answer the bell.

She was only nineteen, and though vivacious and pretty she knew nothing of coquetry and was totally inexperienced in masculine wiles. Martin's eyes took her in from head to foot when she came into his room. He found something provocative in the trim figure in its close-fitting print dress. He thought her girlish nervousness very attractive as she stood listening to the proposition which he began making to her.

He unfolded it in a tangle of specious words calculated to impress her simple mind. He made Jane's dismissal sound rather like a change in the Ministry, and Ada's elevation to the vacant post as if it were a matter of national importance. He emphasized the valuable experience she would gain in undertaking the extra work. He dwelt ostentatiously on the generous advance of two pounds per annum which he proposed to make in her wages. It all sounded very seductive.

"And I want you to understand, Ada," he said, "that in asking you to undertake the double duties of house-parlormaid her ladyship and I do not want you to think that we are only considering our own interests. There are plenty of competent servants who would be only too glad to enter our service. But we prefer to give you the first refusal of the place."

"Thank you, indeed, Sir Martin," was the breathless reply. "I've always wanted to learn parlor-work, but"—consideration for a fellow-servant prompted the next words—"but I shouldn't like to be taking the bread out of Jane's mouth."

If Martin had no use for unselfishness himself he could admire it in other people. He thought the sentiment very creditable, if stupidly quixotic. It was suitable for a pretty girl to nourish pretty sentiments.

"The thought does you credit," he said. "But you need have no fear on that score. Neither I nor her ladyship should ever let Jane want. To provide for their dependents is an unwritten law amongst the upper classes, a pleasant duty we owe to ourselves. You might remember that. Well, then it's understood that you would like to undertake Jane's duties as well as your own from the time she leaves?"

"Yes, please, Sir Martin. And I'm sure I'll try and do my very best."

"I'm sure you will," said Martin patronizingly.

A gleam of sunlight lit up Ada's fair hair. The bloom of youth was in her cheek. How very pleasant, he thought, to have a nice-looking girl like this about one. He compared her favorably with certain made-up society women whom he had seen at tea on the Terrace. He had observed many a well-known M.P. indulging in a flirtation during that function. He was by no means uninformed concerning the clandestine liaisons which rumor attributed to certain highly respected Ministers. If these things happened in Cabinet circles there could be little harm in his taking a mild interest in a pretty dependent.

Not that he harbored sinister intentions towards her.

He made that reservation to himself. It was a censorious world, prone to make the worst of everything. But that need not prevent him unbending a little towards a member of his own household. It was natural that she should please his eye. She possessed a shapeliness quite out of the common. Her coloring was so fresh. Of course she respected and looked up to him, which was as it should be. It would be a pleasant change (from Jane) to see her flitting about in a neat black dress and a frilly white apron.

"By the way," he said in parenthesis, "do you dust my room?"

"Yes, Sir Martin. Every morning before breakfast."

"You don't find it a rush? I mean, you can manage without hurrying?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Sir Martin, except on the days I turn out the library and drawing-room. Tuesdays and Fridays."

Martin seemed to consider.

"On those days there's no reason why you shouldn't finish dusting here after breakfast. You will not disturb me, even if I am in the room."

"Thank you, Sir Martin."

Again the sunbeam played with Ada's hair. Martin experienced a quite strong desire to touch a strand of it, to feel its texture. He got up and took a step towards her, regarding her narrowly. She could stand looking into. Her complexion was like a child's; the soft curve of her cheek was delightful; and there was a dimple in her chin.

"Do you know, Ada," he said, "you're a very pretty girl?"

Ada blushed. The unexpected compliment, coming from so high a quarter, flattered her.

"I don't think about my looks, Sir Martin," she replied modestly.

"That's right. What I meant was, you ought to be careful with the young men—the tradesmen and so on—who come to the house. I daresay, now" (a jocular note came into Martin's voice), "some of them pay you attentions at the back door, eh?"

"I don't take notice if they do."

"And you don't walk out with any one?"

"Oh, no, Sir Martin."

"I'm glad to hear it. A girl of your age has to be on her guard with *young* men." The adjective was just sufficiently emphasized. "They're not always to be trusted. By the way, that reminds me. I hope you are not a talker, Ada?"

"Oh, no, Sir Martin."

"I mean about other people's concerns. Some servants have a very reprehensible habit of discussing with their friends—and even in the kitchen—what they hear in the dining- or drawing-room. You should always avoid retailing conversations, like this one, for instance. But you're a good girl, and I'm sure you understand."

With that he patted her shoulder paternally and dismissed her with an encouraging smile. When she reached the kitchen she found Jane there. She stood listlessly, making pretense to help the cook. Her eyes were red. Ada went and stood by her, anxious to express sympathy, but shy of doing so. The two women remained stolidly silent. Cook, fond of Jane, was too indignant for speech. Ada had to break the uncomfortable silence.

"They've asked me to take your place, Jane," she stammered. "At least, Sir Martin did. I don't want to do nothing behind your back, though."

Jane raised patient, watery eyes.

"You'll do better than me," she said quietly. "Don't let's talk about it. You said there'd be changes, and they've come. I'll show you how to set the table for dinner now, if you like, and the way the napkins are folded when there's visitors. Sir Martin's particular about the shape."

"And why?" snorted cook contemptuously. "Because he sees it done at the cheap restorongs he goes to, and at his trashy tradesmen's banquets! He don't know it's not the proper thing in good houses, and he wouldn't be any wiser if he was told. Thinks himself a gentleman! Pah! Gentlemen know how to treat their servants!"

XXVII

DOROTHY BECOMES AN ASSET

WELL, I never! Whatever can the man want?" Mrs. Peacock's question was addressed to herself. A knock at the door had taken her to the window, where she stood peeping behind the lace curtain. To her astonishment Martin stood on the doorstep.

"What's up?" asked Edgar, who had come in on his way home from the flying ground where he was learning aviation.

"I don't know. It's your father!"

He jumped up, intending to bolt. But Mrs. Peacock's small servant, admitting the visitor, made that impracticable.

Martin came in with the assurance of a man who is conferring a social favor on a poor relation. His circumstances had altered so much since he had last seen Aunt Polly that he no longer felt the old-time awe of her; at least, he deluded himself that he did not. Moreover, he had come to assert his authority and to call her to account, a position he had never been able to rise to in the past. But Mrs. Peacock was in no way embarrassed. Although she had not seen him for quite sixteen years she knew her Martin. She observed the air of importance he gave himself and discounted it; she guessed what he had come for. She felt as capable as ever of facing

twenty Martins in wordy warfare and holding her own with them.

"How-de-do?" she said. "I won't ask why you're honoring me with a visit. You've got the reason all ready, I can see."

"Good afternoon," Martin responded in a superior tone. "It took me a long while to find my way here."

"H'm. Sixteen years or thereabouts. Well, it's gone quickly."

Martin turned to Edgar.

"Why aren't you at business?"

The boy reddened. "I don't go every day, father."

"So I understand."

"Harris is always there. Besides, I'm not much use while I'm learning."

"Here, I suppose?" snapped Martin.

"Well," interposed Mrs. Peacock, "isn't there anything about the antique trade that he can pick up here?"

"I didn't come to talk about the antique trade."

"Then you cut along, Edgar. You're not wanted."

And Edgar, glad of the opportunity to escape further cross-examination, rose in a hurry. He did not forget to kiss Mrs. Peacock before he went. Martin watched the attention austere.

"He's a good boy," said the old woman, when the door was shut.

"I haven't found him particularly so."

"That's not surprising. You never see good in anybody. You'd pick holes in an Aubusson carpet. Now, what's it all about? Let's have it. Would you like to sit down, or can't you bend?"

Martin sat down. As he did so his eye fell on a picture

in an old frame that hung on the wall facing him. It depicted a slim-figured girl in the tall powdered wig and brocade dress of the eighteenth century. Narrow, sloping shoulders, bare neck, demure expression, ample dark background, were all in keeping with a portrait of the period. The canvas was quite small, about fifteen inches by nine.

"Nice bit, isn't it?" observed Mrs. Peacock slyly, following his glance. "Who would you put it down to?"

"I haven't come to talk about old paintings," Martin fretted, his interest in the picture evaporating. He had a suspicion that she was trying to lay a trap for him.

"It isn't an old painting," she grinned. "But there! You never did know anything about art. More's the pity."

Martin fidgeted under her uncompromising candor. If there was one thing more than another on which he liked to be thought an authority it was art. On the strength of an article in *The Connoisseur* on Primitives, which he had carefully read up, he liked to pose as an expert on pictures. Moreover, he had imagined this one to be a Romney or a Gainsborough. All he could do now was to ignore his mistake.

"At the present moment," he said, "I am extremely concerned about Dorothy. It is she whom I have come to talk about. I have discovered that, strictly against my wishes, she has been studying what you call art, and that I am in your debt for the expensive lessons she has incurred."

"Gracious! Fancy your ownin' up to bein' in *my* debt!" declared Mrs. Peacock with amused surprise. "But about Dolly. You don't owe me nothing. What

I give her mostly is encouragement, and that's cheap."

"Excuse me. This morning I ran up against her in a public art gallery—painting. I didn't speak to her then, you understand. There were students about. I passed on. But at home, after din—lunch, I had a talk with her. She is not particularly good at subterfuge, and I did not find it a difficult matter to extract from her the information that she had been taking painting lessons, and that the delinquent was——"

"Me? Oh, you and your long words! Can't you speak plain? Why don't you call me a liar and have done with it? Much I'd mind what you say! So you went on naggin' the poor child because I bought her some paints and sent her to where she could get good teachin'. Well, if I like to do that, what business is it of yours? Can't I use my money as I like? It's come by honestly, which is more than some people can say—people who go and get knighted mysterious! What you want to come and argue about it for I don't understand. We ain't so bound up in each other that we want excuses to meet. And straight out, Martin, it's just as well you should know that I haven't any better opinion of you than when you was a dirty-nosed little boy in the grocery. If that makes your ears burn I can't help it. It's true. It's no good your putting on airs with me. As for the way you're treatin' your children, it's a scandal—preventin' them doing this and that just because they like it. It's only your cussedness makes you talk about owin' me anything on Dolly's account. When did you ever want to pay more than you could help? You leave me and her alone. She'll be earnin' her own livin' soon. Surprises you to hear that, doesn't it? Well, it is surprising that anything to do with you should be

talented. Something of me about the twins, I expect. Look at that 'Old Master' once more. It's her work. Done on old canvas. I put her up to it. And when one of my West-end picture-buyers comes in and sees it, he'll take it for an original if I'm not mistaken."

While he listened to this tirade the expression in Martin's face gradually changed. Anger gave way to surprise, surprise to curiosity. It seemed incredible that the painting should be Dorothy's work. It had completely taken him in; in Mrs. Peacock's opinion it would probably take in an expert. If that was the case, then. . . . He got up, put on his pince-nez, and examined it closely. Mrs. Peacock maintained a dramatic silence.

"I had no idea," he murmured meekly.

"Of course you hadn't. How can you tell what a person can do till you give 'em a chance? All you did was to put stumbling blocks in the girl's way."

"There's considerable merit in it."

"Oh, yes, merit! But you have to come to me to find it out. And when you say merit, you mean money. Martin, you're as easy to see through as glass!"

Martin felt her penetrating eyes on his turned back. They made it creep.

"It's an eye-opener to you, I reckon," the accusing voice went on.

"It is an agreeable surprise, I admit. If I had expected genuine talent in Dorothy I should have encouraged it myself." He turned from the picture and made an effort to look his aunt in the face. "You take an entirely wrong view of my attitude towards the children. I confess I was angry with Dorothy. I dislike anything in the nature of deceit. It hurt me to find that she had taken up an occupation without asking my ad-

vice. I'm afraid I may have upset her. It was an unfortunate misunderstanding, and I'm sorry for it. Now that you have explained matters I am ready and willing to express my regret to her and to offer her every facility for studying art. I may even think about a studio for her."

Mrs. Peacock gave him a look full of derision.

"Oh, Martin!" she jeered, "you haven't changed. Always ready with a get-out! I don't believe you have the pluck of a louse!"

Martin shifted uneasily on his feet.

"You have always misunderstood me," he mumbled. "One day, perhaps, if you should ever need it and I am able to help you——"

"Oh, don't waste your breath," she interrupted irascibly. "The only thing you'd help me to gladly would be the workhouse, and I shan't have to come to you or anybody else for that. You'd best be going before I lose my temper. Good-by. Don't come again too soon."

Martin went. He was quite glad to go. Mrs. Peacock shut the door viciously, almost snapping it on his coat-tails, leaving him to juggle with the front door latch and get out as best he could. But she put her head out of the window to give him a parting word of advice.

"Mar—tin!" she shrilled. "Take the green tram and change into number eight when you get past the 'Coach and Horses.'"

"Thanks. There's a taxi at the end of the street," he answered.

But the turning was not in sight of Mrs. Peacock's windows. Had it been, she would have seen Martin get into the green tram, as he had all along meant to do.

He did not consider a visit to his aunt was worth a two-shilling cab fare.

Ada opened the door to him. If nobody was about he generally found time to speak to her. But this afternoon he barely noticed her. He was thinking of Dorothy's clever little imitation of eighteenth-century portraiture, trying to appraise its value. The girl's eyes followed him wistfully. Something of an expression of misgiving came into them. A very neat and pretty parlor-maid she looked as she stood in the hall, watching him mount the stairs. Jane had been gone three months.

"Tell Miss Dorothy to come up to my study," he threw over his shoulder when he was halfway up.

And presently Dorothy presented herself. She wore a smudged painting-apron and she had been crying. Her father was the last man she desired to see. She had not the faintest notion that he was going to eat the hard words he had spoken to her that morning.

"I have come from your Aunt Mary's," he began. "I think I have made it clear that I can't let her contribute to the expense of your art studies."

"I—I did so want to——" the girl choked.

He patted her arm encouragingly.

"Wait a minute, my dear child. I'm not angry with you any longer. In fact I was about to say that we were at cross purposes this morning. It was partly your own fault. You didn't express yourself very happily. And I was busy. If you had given me some idea of your progress in painting, or, better still, shown me some of your work, I shouldn't have jumped to the conclusion that you were wasting your time. Luckily, I happened to see the little picture you gave your aunt,

and I immediately recognized its merit. If you had shown it to me first all this misunderstanding would not have occurred. I was only too glad to see the progress you had made. Now, I haven't time to go into details, but I want you to put out of your mind all that I said this morning and to understand that far from wishing to stand in your light, I am anxious to help you."

"Oh, Daddy!" exclaimed Dorothy.

"Only it must be understood that I bear the expense of your studies, not your aunt. Later on I might perhaps build on a studio to the house. You would like that?"

She could hardly believe her ears. Martin's abrupt change of attitude came as such a pleasant surprise that she had to acknowledge it with an unaccustomed hug.

"Oh, do forgive me!" she cried contritely. "I've been saying and thinking the most horrid things about you. I've made mother quite miserable. I thought you were unkind and tyrannical, and I said so. And all the while you were only waiting for an opportunity to be sweet. I don't deserve you a bit!"

"That's all forgiven and forgotten," he said magnanimously. "Always remember you can trust me to do what is best." He unwound her arms from his neck. "By the way, if you have any more copies like the one at your aunt's you might show them to me. I might be able to dispose of them for you."

"I've got three in my bedroom. Unframed, though. Two Greuzes and an Ostade. Come and see them now."

She linked her arm in his and, deliciously elated, took him to her bedroom. It was in a state of disorder that at any other time would have aroused his ire. The

bed was pushed into a corner. The curtains had been removed from the window. The blind was wound up to the top of the sash. A folding easel, holding a small canvas, stood in the center of the room. A palette and an open box of twisted tubes littered the chair beside it. Paint-rags lay on the floor. Paint-brushes filled the toothbrush-vase on the washstand. The Greuzes and the Ostade stood in a row on the chest of drawers. The atmosphere of the room reeked of oil and varnish.

Martin went straight to the three paintings. They were on panels. Like the Georgian portrait, they looked old. Dorothy had copied the tone and reproduced the brush-work of the originals with remarkable exactitude. It struck him that with a very little treatment and the addition of old frames they would deceive an uninstructed picture-buyer. He could see them hanging in Harris's shop, surrounded by antiques, masquerading as old masters. He felt a glow of satisfaction at the thought.

"You certainly have a talent for reproduction," he observed. "I should confine myself to it, if I were you. Where did you copy these, my dear?"

"At the Wallace Collection. A girl I know showed me how to square them from photographs. It makes the work awfully easy. Do you really think they're worth selling?"

He looked at the back of the panels. Ammonia and a coating of dirt would age them considerably.

"I think so," he said and turned to go. By the door a larger canvas brought him to a stop. "What is that?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," Dorothy hesitated. "I was doing it for mother's birthday, but she doesn't like it."

He turned the canvas round. It was an unfinished portrait of himself. Even so, the likeness was striking enough to startle him. He surveyed it as impartially as he could, wondering why it gave him a feeling of being stripped. Burns' searching words came to his mind—"To see ourselves as others see us." The words and something about the portrait made him uncomfortable. Still, the flattering feeling of satisfaction which most people experience when viewing a portrait of themselves for the first time took hold of him. It seemed to increase his importance. As his eyes grew accustomed to the face on the canvas his power of criticism of it as a likeness gradually declined. The stripped feeling left him. The subtle individuality which Dorothy, with unconscious insight into his character, had conveyed into her drawing escaped him. He thought only of her motive in painting it. He assumed it to have been respect.

"It's quite good," he said. "I should like you to finish it. It would look well in the dining-room. It might even be exhibited first."

"Really? Then you don't think it so bad?"

It would have gratified him greatly to see his portrait on the walls of an exhibition. In the palmy days of his Hemford popularity there had occasionally been talk among his constituents of presenting him with his portrait. It had only wanted some prominent person to take the lead in carrying out this work of recognition, but somehow no one had come forward.

"I have no doubt I shall like it when you've finished it," he replied. "But— isn't there something a trifle wrong about the eyes—too close together?"

"Are they? You see," she explained, "the study I

made for the portrait was done one evening when you were half asleep."

"Curious," ruminated Martin. "It looks so wide-awake."

XXVIII

"DUDS"

THREE hundred pounds, however judiciously laid out, will not go far in stocking a shop with old furniture and works of art. Martin had found it necessary to realize that sum to make anything of a show. As a compensation for the outlay of the additional hundred he had insisted on Harris finding the first quarter's rent of the new premises and paying it in advance.

Martin himself had selected the shop—a ground-floor in a side street which by courtesy only could be said to be in Mayfair, a locality he deemed best for the new venture. Harris and his family occupied the top floor.

The show-room was the reverse of overcrowded. Its contents consisted of what the trade call "furnishing pieces" as distinct from exhibition and collector's pieces. For the present the latter were beyond the firm's means. But Harris had bought wisely. He had confined himself to Georgian mahogany and a small quantity of unimportant Jacobean oak. With the addition of all that was best of his old stock of plate, china and other decorative objects, he had achieved as good a display as could be expected. Any one else but Martin would have congratulated him on the result.

In shop hours Martin kept tactfully away. But two or three times a week in the evening he would turn up, look at the books, and debate the question of sales and

purchases. Concerning the latter he and Harris were constantly at variance. Harris, profiting by experience, made a principle of investing three-fourths of the takings in additional stock. As, for some time, these were very limited, the balance was hardly sufficient to cover the thirty shillings a week which he drew for living purposes.

Martin had not allowed for this drain on profits, nor for the policy of a continual turnover. He had dreamt of constant sales at top prices and subsequent purchases on credit. His discovery that in the antique business credit is practically never given to “the trade,” but that “the trade” has sometimes to give it to the customer, came as an unpleasant surprise. He had to put up with another disappointment as well. Customers were scarce. The street in which the shop was situated was not precisely a busy one. People on the lookout for antiques seemed to miss it.

At the end of two months he was daily becoming more impatient at the meager results Harris was able to show. He knew Harris was not a knave, but he feared he might be a fool. In his heart he believed that had he personally been able to look after things he would have done much better than his partner. What he disliked about Harris was that he showed no impatience. He himself wanted to make money with indecent haste. It seemed to him that all his life he had been waiting for this very opportunity. To miss it might be fatal as well as foolish. Such another might never arise. He would have scouted the suggestion that he had no real capacity for business. He would have argued the very opposite by citing his success in driving a hard bargain with the Grimwoods and a satisfactory one with Gammel. He did not know

that the old aptitude was gone from him with the circumstances that had given it birth. He would not have believed that twenty unfertile years had left him incapable of judging a monetary transaction with his old acuteness and courage.

"You're not making enough show, Harris," he said one day. "With the exception of my daughter's pictures, which, by the way, we seem to depend on mainly for sales, the stock is most unattractive. I thought you would do better than this. You led me to think so. It's deplorable. Your sales only show a profit of twenty pounds in two months."

"It's as much as we can expect, Sir Martin," Harris replied patiently. "We're hardly known yet. Things will get better later on. I'm doing my best. So is Mr. Edgar. He's a good salesman," he added loyally, with the mental reservation, "when he's here."

"I should like to see more evidence of his capacity," Martin grumbled.

"The customers like his 'take-it-or-leave-it' manner. It's friendly and gentlemanly."

"Then we must give him more scope—more things to sell—a change of stock to make the place look more attractive from the outside. We're very short of small ornamental things—china, colored prints, Sheffield plate. I'll see about getting them myself." After a moment or two of hesitation he added: "When they come don't estimate their value by the invoice. Sell them at the usual trade prices. I can't afford to go on like this."

And he went away. He had the address of the firms which Harris had casually referred to during their first business talk. A visit to them resulted in the arrival at the shop a few mornings later of cases containing a large

assortment of "curios." They consisted of Bow and Chelsea figures, highly colored Lowestoft vases, Sèvres plaques, all bearing their respective marks; pewter with the "touch" and date of good periods; candlesticks, baskets, snuffers and tea-caddies in plate of Old Sheffield design; color-prints after Morland and Cipriani; enameled wine-tickets, brass chestnut-roasters and Indian gods, cloisonné ware, Wedgwood medallions—a collection of wide variety and effective appearance. Edgar helped to unpack them.

"The governor's been spending some," he exclaimed. "These things will brighten up the shop a lot."

But Harris was frowning.

"It's a bit thick, using them for window-dressing even," he said moodily.

"Why? What's the matter with them? They look almost new."

"That's what they are, Mr. Edgar. Quite new. Duds, in fact."

Edgar looked up from the recesses of a packing-case.

"Well, why not? Anything does for window-dressing. Not half a bad idea of my father's, I call it."

Harris shook his head. He liked Edgar. Two months of association with the pleasant-mannered boy had sufficiently informed him of his straightforward character.

"They're not for show only; they're for sale," he said presently. "Sir Martin was here the other evening. He said we've got to make quicker sales and show more profit."

"Oh!"

Harris scratched his head.

"Whether honesty pays or not in politics I don't

know. But in the antique line it's a sure thing. You're fair doomed if you start selling duds as genuine old."

"But, my dear chap," protested Edgar, a shade indignantly, "surely you don't mean to imply that my father wants you to do such a thing? You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick. My father's a martinet and lots of other things a chap of my age finds difficult to live with, but he'd draw the line at crooked dealing. Why, if I so much as let him guess you thought he meant us to sell this stuff as a take-in he'd be mad. Of course we're not going to do that. Come on, let's stick 'em in the window. Which shall we do? Mark them in plain figures and label them duds, or what? I like that word."

"Ah, now you've opened a problem!" was the dubious reply. "Here's the invoice. We've either got to admit they're fakes and sell them at a small profit, or charge the prices they'd fetch if they were what they pretend to be. There's no halfway. And, see here, Mr. Edgar, it's not a case to argue about. Your father did mean us to do the latter. I'm bound to say it even if you're angry with me for doing so."

"I'm sure you're wrong. Anyway, they won't be sold as anything except reproductions while I'm in the business."

An inflexible expression came into the boy's face. With a subtle difference it made him look very like his father.

No more was said on the controversial subject. Harris, obviously depressed, helped to make a display of the new stock in the window. While this was proceeding a customer came in, attracted by two Nankin jars which Edgar had placed to the best advantage on an oak chest.

"They're fifty shillings the pair," he said, after looking up the wholesale price. "Let me get them out for you. Of course," he went on, "they're not old—only reproductions, as I daresay you've noticed for yourself. Naturally, they would be worth a good ten pounds if they were the real thing."

The inquirer, who was handling one of the jars, promptly put it down.

"Thanks," he said. "I thought they were old. That is why I asked to see them. I don't care to buy anything modern. I appreciate your frankness. Good morning."

Harris emerged mournfully from the back of the shop to which he had retreated when the customer had entered.

"There'll be trouble over these things, I'm afraid," he said. "Sir Martin's sure to object to your giving them away."

"Oh, rats!" laughed Edgar. "Look out! Here comes a buyer. Leave him to me. I'll sell him something."

On this occasion he was successful and also with a few other customers who were tempted by moderate prices. From a business point of view, however, these sales meant very little in the aggregate.

Two days later Martin looked in. The changed aspect of the window pleased him. He entered in a good humor.

"Where's Mr. Edgar?" he asked.

"He left five minutes ago. It's just on closing time," Harris replied, following him into the small back room where the books were kept.

"And how's business?" was Martin's next question, as he turned the leaves of the day book. "Hullo, what does this mean? Bow figure, fifteen shillings! Set of six pewter plates, seventeen-and-six! Two Leeds bas-

kets, thirty shillings!" He turned in surprise on Harris. "Why these ridiculous prices!"

"They show twenty-five per cent. on the cost. It's as much as we could expect to get."

Indignation came into Martin's face.

"A paltry profit of fifteen shillings on things that should have fetched almost ten pounds!" he fumed.

"Are you dreaming, Harris!"

"No, Sir Martin. Those articles weren't sold as genuine pieces, only as reproductions. We"—Harris hesitated over the pronoun—"we didn't think you wished us to take people in."

Martin began to grow red about the ears.

"You're shuffling," he said angrily. "You know perfectly well that in business a certain amount of license is permissible. You were not told to guarantee the articles as genuine. You were told to ask the same prices as other firms get for them. I suppose you think because it's only my money that's involved you can afford to be generous. You forget that, by the terms of our agreement, I can turn you out of the business any time I choose."

"You can do what you think best, sir," Harris replied sturdily. "But about these dud goods, there was no misunderstanding of your meaning on my part. I told Mr. Edgar what you wanted, and he wouldn't believe you meant to palm them off as genuine. In fact, he regular jumped on me for hinting as much."

"I don't like your way of expressing yourself," snapped Martin. "You had better not put things like that, Harris. It's a scurrilous statement. The fact of the matter is you have shown yourself utterly incompetent. You allow yourself to be overruled by a mere boy,

and then to excuse yourself you insult me. I shall speak to Mr. Edgar when I get home. And if I have any more of this double-dealing, for that is what it amounts to, I shall wash my hands of the whole business." A plaintive note came into his voice and his eyes went sanctimoniously upward. "I financed you because I thought you were an honest man and would prove yourself a just steward and a help to my son. But I won't be duped."

A strong rejoinder was on the tip of Harris's tongue, but he saw it was not worth while, and refrained from making it. When Martin had left he drew down the blinds and locked up the shop. He was very depressed. All the way up the unlighted stairs to his living rooms he thought with regret of the little marine store which he had relinquished for the unsubstantial luster of association with a man whom he had assumed to be a gentleman. He had seen his mistake for some time past. Now he was absolutely certain of Martin's unscrupulousness.

"Him duped!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "Might as well try to dupe a money-lending solicitor!"

XXIX

EDGAR GOES ON STRIKE

THE only thing that seriously upset Martin was being found out. It hurt his vanity. And yet all his life through, every one of his humiliations had been caused by other people seeing him in his true colors. Aunt Polly had been the first. He hated her for it. Liversidge and Gammel mistrusted him. He hated them. In the House of Commons his singleness of purpose was under suspicion. He was one of the Ishmaels of that company.

Now Harris had found him out and he hated Harris. His reputation with the Jew had been exceptionally short-lived. To have to face him constantly, knowing he was discredited—and by an inferior—was a galling prospect. It made him doubt whether he had the capacity of impressing any given person for long. It made him feel small. That was what enraged him. He was too pharisaical to look within himself for the cause of his unpopularity and non-success, too egotistical to be ashamed of his own shabby venality. He refused to see that it was that which had limited his achievements and discredited him in all eyes save those of Rose, the one being who remained steadfastly blind to his faults.

Consumed by his own pregnant feelings he ignored Ada when she opened the door to him on his return. Generally her smiling face was apt to put him in a good

humor. But she was not smiling now. She looked white and scared.

"Oh, Sir Martin," she whispered, "may I speak to you?"

"Not now," he answered curtly. "Later on, perhaps. I'll ring for you."

He went straight on to the library. The calm scene which he there blundered on did nothing to assuage his fit of ill-temper. It was Rose's hour, the time of day when the twins usually sought her. Then, with all thought of the round of household duties dismissed until the morrow, she loved to give herself up to complete enjoyment of her children. Just now Dorothy was sprawling over her mother. Edgar sat cross-legged at her feet. The domestic picture had no attractions for Martin. His entrance seemed to have the effect of making the atmosphere of the room several degrees cooler.

"Get up. I want you," he said.

His peremptory tone made the boy feel as though he were being addressed by a vacuum cleaner about to gulp down a speck of dust. It put him on the defensive at once.

"I have just come from Harris," proceeded Martin. "He tells me that you ignored my instructions about the new stock, and sold things at a trifling profit over cost price."

"Why, yes. That is, if you mean the fake stuff. I was a bit down on Harris for thinking you wanted to palm it off as old. A chap couldn't stand that sort of insinuation about his father. I told him he was talking nonsense."

Exasperated by a monetary loss, as he regarded it, and sore at the prospect of having to cut a sorry figure

before Harris, Martin made the further mistake of letting his temper get the better of his discretion.

"You were not put into the business to teach other people how to conduct it. Your interference was officious. You have not only been foolish but dishonest."

"What?" the boy flushed.

"Yes, dishonest. And to me, your father. My instructions were that the things should be sold at the best price they would command. You seem to forget you owe your first duty to me, not to credulous customers who expect to be deluded."

"Martin—please!" implored Rose. She put out a hand to Edgar as though to control his rising temper.

"Mother," he said, "you and Dolly had better leave us for a bit. Or shall we go into the dining-room? Father and I must thrash this out by ourselves."

"Yes, dear, we'll go. But do remember that your father's much older than you are, and knows best."

Directly the door was closed on his mother and sister, Edgar stood squarely up to his father.

"Do you mean to tell me, sir, that you really expected me to sell that rubbish as genuine?"

"I do," Martin snapped. "I not only expect you to, but I say you've got to."

Edgar kept his eyes fixed on his father's face. Into his own there crept a curious change of expression—complete disillusionment. Although his nature had often made him at variance with Martin he had hitherto habituated himself to regard him as a superior being, albeit a difficult one to get on with. But now, with painful suddenness, he realized how much he had been mistaken. That his father, who had always posed as the most rigid

of moralists, should deliberately advocate petty dishonesty appalled him.

"I refuse, father," he rejoined coldly. "I think it's a mean trick to do people down."

"Then you can go," Martin burst out. "Do you understand? You leave my house. I give you twenty-four hours to think it over."

"I don't want twenty-four hours. I've nothing to think over. I can go now."

Rage had made Martin say rather more than he meant. It was the kind of bluff that can only be justified by more bluster.

"Very well," he said. "You needn't expect another penny from me."

"I wouldn't take it. As a matter of fact, I don't need your money. I only stuck to the beastly shop because I thought I owed it to you. Thanks to that old trump, Aunt Polly, I'm in a fair way to getting my C. Av.—my flying ticket. I shall be able to make my living that way—decently. This is damned upsetting for poor mother, but it's the best thing that could have happened for me. I can strike out for myself now."

Like a card-player who is "called" on a weak hand, Martin made a belated attempt to vindicate himself. With just the right touch of paternal emotion in his voice he said:

"Edgar, I'm hurt. I'm disappointed in you," and waited to see what effect it would have.

The boy winced under the reproach.

"It's worse to be disappointed in one's father," he said gruffly, and made blindly for the door.

XXX

MARTIN'S HARVESTING

THE study bell rang violently. Ada nearly dropped the butler's tray she was about to carry to the dining-room. Her face grew pallid, and she said, "Oh, my!" The cook shot a look at her. Discernment and sympathy were in her glance.

"You'd better wait a minute before you answer that bell," she advised. "You look like a specter."

The color slowly came back into Ada's cheeks.

"It's the stairs that make me bad," she mumbled.

"No, it ain't. Think I haven't got eyes in me head? Years ago I was a silly weak thing like you. If I was you I should tell the missis."

Ada hung her head. "I haven't told her, but she knows," she moaned. "She was that kind! Oh, why did I ever?"

Martin's bell rang again.

"Listen to that!" scoffed cook. "Tantrums! There's been ructions between the governor and Mr. Edgar, and the old-'un's taking it out of the bells. This is a terrible house for quarreling, and it's all along of him. You'd better not let Mr. Hard-face guess what's the matter with you. Then you'd get the kick-out and no mistake, my girl."

Ada said nothing as she went to the door. Her

steps dragged. She mounted the stairs to the study wearily.

"Well," said Martin when she came in, "what do you want to see me about, Ada? I'm busy and I'm worried, so don't be long over it."

His tone was sharper than usual. The furtive, hungry look which she was used to seeing in his face was absent from it. Martin's *amour propre* was still smarting. He felt he had not scored in his encounter with Edgar. Moreover, Rose and Dorothy were in tears, and he had just been very unkind to the former. Mother and daughter were in Edgar's room now, crying and helping him to pack.

If Ada had looked bright and comely her presence might have done something to allay Martin's irritability. But her complexion for once looked unhealthy; her hair had lost its gloss; her eyes were red-rimmed, and her general expression was one of extreme dolor.

"Oh, Sir Martin," were her first words, "whatever shall we do? It can't be hid, soon. And my lady—she's so kind!"

Martin went gray and cold. His body stiffened defensively.

"Ada, what—what are you talking about?" he asked aggressively.

"You know very well," she said in an agonized voice, and hid her face in her hands.

But if she expected sympathy or kindness or even an expression of concern from Martin she was disappointed. All he said was:

"You mustn't talk as though I were responsible for your—plight."

She took her hands from her face. For one long

moment she stared at him, stared into implacable eyes which, such a little while ago, had softened and subjugated her.

"Oh, God!" she cried. "You can't mean that. You told me I could trust a gentleman. Oh, don't look at me like that, as if I was making up the words. You know you did—that night as her ladyship went to Hemford with Miss Dorothy—that night——" Sobs choked her.

Martin was in a cold sweat. He was frightened, but with Rose downstairs, with his reputation at stake, it would be fatal to admit anything. No, he must bluff it out. He must keep cool and not exaggerate the difficulty. Other men had had to face it. It was not a criminal matter. Besides, Ada had acted as she had with her eyes open. She had no right to put the whole responsibility upon him. It was not as if he were a practiced libertine and had deliberately deceived her. Indeed, he had never previously erred in this way. In that respect he was not like other men. The comparison gave him courage. Yes, he must decidedly bluff it out. He knew Ada to be a simple girl, not calculating, certainly not vicious. If he kept his head she could be managed.

"You must be mistaken," he said.

Dumbly she shook her head.

"Mistaken," he supplemented, "in attributing this to me."

"You know there's no one else," she asseverated.

"Oh, come, come! Remember you are talking to a man of the world. You must not expect me to credit that. You're in trouble, and I'll help you if I can. But not if you make a charge of that sort."

The disclaimer took her aback. She caught at his arm frenziedly.

"Oh, how can you talk like that?" she cried. "All these weeks. . . . And now you want to make me believe there was nothing!"

"Not so loud. Do you want others to hear?"

"It wouldn't matter if they did hear, so long as it wasn't true, would it?" she flashed back. Involuntarily her primitive mind fell back on a phrase which, though it smacked of cheap drama, was nevertheless intensely real to her. "It means the river for me. But if I do I'll show you up first!"

"Now, listen to me," said Martin persuasively. "You're excited and talking wildly. First of all, people who threaten suicide seldom commit it. Secondly, if you 'showed me up,' as you put it, who would believe you? It's notorious that servants in a desperate state of mind habitually bring charges of that sort against their masters. They are always discredited. Believe me, you would simply be cutting the ground from under your own feet. Think now—don't interrupt—you remember you told me about the young man in the drapery business who wanted to marry you. Well, why not accept him at once and—and so end all your worries?"

Ada's amazement at the insidious advice deprived her of speech.

"Well?" said Martin.

A horrified look was in the girl's eyes. She shrank from him, physically and mentally.

"Not for—no one!" she exclaimed. "Take in a young fellow who means honestly by me so that you may get off scot free? A mean trick like that? No, I'd rather die!"

Inwardly Martin was quaking at her fierceness. It portended trouble. But he was careful not to look perturbed. He gave a little indifferent shrug of the shoulders and looked at his watch.

"You beast!" she flamed out. "You're not even thinking about me! You're thinking about your blessed old supper! Oh, why didn't I listen to cook? *She* knew all about you after she'd been five minutes in the house."

She turned away in disgust and took a step towards the door. Martin's guilty conscience made him jump to the conclusion that her departure would immediately be followed by a kitchen cabal, in which his wrong-doing would figure prominently and loudly.

"Wait a minute," he said anxiously. "You must calm yourself before you go. You're a little hysterical, that's all. It's foolish of you to go on like that, or to lose your temper, particularly with me. Why you should assume I'm not sympathetic, I don't know. On the contrary, I'm thinking how I can help you. If it's money, you can count on me for as much as I can spare."

"I wouldn't touch your money! Money won't take away my shame. I *am* ashamed now. I might have taken it different and not blamed you, seeing as it takes two to do some kinds of wrong. But to see you standing there lying and looking at me as if you could— Oh, let me go and take in your beastly supper, you—you hypocrite!"

Before he could guess her intention, indeed, almost before she was aware of it herself, she stepped up to him, and struck him smartly on the cheek, and fled from the room.

Martin stood stupefied.

Supper that night was an ordeal to Martin. Neither Rose nor Dorothy put in an appearance, and he had to eat alone, waited on in dreadful silence by Ada. He hurried through it and escaped to his study. He did not know whether Edgar had gone or not. He had not the courage to inquire. The house was abnormally still. He tried to read, but his mind wandered. The whole evening had been made up of harassing scenes. First with Harris, then Edgar, then Rose and Dorothy, then Rose alone, and finally with Ada. The one with Ada disturbed him most of all. For hours he paced up and down the room, turning her case over in his mind. He had been weak, imprudent, but that was all. He used the slips of other men to palliate his fault. Were there not stories and whispers going about the Lobbies of the House concerning the indiscretions of men in high political positions? Their moral plane was no higher than his. He overlooked the fact that rumor had never imputed to them the seduction of servant-girls. He did not trouble to argue whether those men were the husbands of loving and utterly faithful wives. But he got very little relief from all this special pleading.

Towards eleven o'clock Rose came in.

"Edgar's gone," she said, and commenced to cry quietly.

Martin continued pacing to and fro. Rose sat in the armchair, utterly dejected. Presently she ceased crying and stared in front of her miserably. She wanted Martin to say something about Edgar. If he would only speak!

"Well, it's bed-time," he at last yawned. "Coming?"

"Martin," she beseeched. "*Say* something. Don't you care? Edgar's gone. Say you'll have him back. He's too young to be turned out. It isn't as if he'd done

anything really wrong. He was trying to do right. Oh, my dear, my dear, for my sake won't you send for him in a day or two?"

"Do you know where he's gone?" he asked, pausing in his walk.

"Where could he go at a moment's notice except to——"

"That old woman's!"

"I begged him to, myself. I knew there would be a bed, and sheets aired—and——"

"If you are not coming yet, will you put the lights out?" he said curtly, and left the room.

She put the lights out and sat down again in the dark. Her heart was bleeding. Martin, she argued, was not really adamant. Principle made him severe. No doubt he was quite right—he was always right—but Edgar was gone, and . . . they had quarreled like men. . . . Edgar had dwelt on that just before he said good-by. "Don't try and patch it up, dearest. It's a man's quarrel this time," he had said.

Quarrel? Why should they quarrel at all, father and son, flesh and blood? All her poor tortured heart was one big ache of anxiety and love.

Presently she got up. After all, there was the morning to be faced, and the next morning . . . life. . . . One must sleep. Sleep gave one courage and strength to go on. She felt suddenly tired and old—quite fifty, and she was not that yet by nearly ten years.

She groped her way along the dark corridor. Her fingers came into contact with Edgar's door-knob and lingered there.

She went in, switching on the light. There were lots of things he had not taken with him, scattered about.

Everything was untidy, except the bed, turned-down, creaseless, inviting sleep . . . only he would never sleep in it again. Somehow she was dreadfully sure of that.

Years and years ago, when he was a small boy, still very plump and cuddleable, it had been his habit to beseech her to sleep with him for one night, just for a treat. When Martin was away from home she had taken it in turns to sleep with her growing babies. They had lovingly squabbled over her.

"It's my night with mummy to-night" . . . "No, it isn't" . . . "Yes, it is. . . ."

Rose was back in the past. She undressed and got into the small bed, stretching out impotent arms. . . . It was Edgar's turn to-night.

XXXI

MARTIN PAYS HIS TITHE

SHUT the door, Ada," said Rose gently. "You can sit down while I talk to you."

Ada gratefully but nervously took the edge of a chair. She was trembling. Rose looked at her compassionately.

"I am so sorry for you," she began in her soft voice. "You mustn't think you have no friends now. I'm quite sure you must have been terribly tempted before——"

"Oh, my lady!" Ada gulped.

"Will you tell me in confidence who it is? It is just possible, if you wished it, I could talk to the young man and put things right for you. He ought to marry you. Won't he?"

"He can't, my lady," was the shamefaced reply. "He's not free. And he wouldn't if he could, and I wouldn't neither," she added in a changed tone. "I hate him now. He's a bad, cruel man."

"I'm sorry," said Rose again. "Does your mother know?"

Ada shook her head. "I daren't tell her. Oh, what am I going to do?"

"You're going to do what is best. I've been making inquiries. I know of a woman who will take you in and look after you cheaply for the next few months.

And afterwards, when you're strong enough, you can come back to us if you like. I won't preach to you, because I can see you're dreadfully unhappy as it is, and I'm sure this will be a lesson to you all your life."

"It will indeed, my lady," Ada wept. "I'm sure I don't deserve that you should be so good to me."

"I think I can sympathize with unhappy people because I have had such a happy life myself," Rose went on. "Of course I have my worries—one does when one has children and responsibilities—but I've had a good husband by my side all these years, and that is a tremendous thing to a woman, my dear. I hope you may one day know such happiness yourself."

The kindly words were almost more than Ada could bear. She could not answer them. But she found herself wondering whether it was not better for a woman to remain unwed and embittered by the shame that had overtaken her, than go through life like this sweet mistress of hers, duped by a false belief, wasting her love on an unworthy man. It seemed incredible to her that Rose could have shared her husband's life all these years and borne his children without getting to know the manner of man he was. Untutored servant-girl as she was, she appreciated that Rose had always lived with an ideal of her own creation and that the man who had betrayed her, by whose side she had slept for twenty odd years, was an utter stranger to her.

She listened mutely while Rose proceeded to give her details of what she had arranged. Ada was to leave in a few days. Rose would come and see her sometimes. Rose would help her with money. She was not to worry. Rose, later on, if necessary, would see the girl's mother. It would be a dear little baby. Her manner was sweet

and tender, devoid of any touch of condemnation, entirely human.

Ada went away worshipping her. She worshiped her all the more because she was convinced that, even if Rose knew the truth, if the whole fabric of her life were shattered by it, she would still be compassionate. For that reason Martin's secret was safe. Ada would have killed herself rather than reveal it.

Meanwhile, every night on her knees she prayed to the God who understands women, that the child, for Rose's sake as well as her own, might be born dead.

Martin withdrew more into himself than ever. He did not miss Edgar, but he rankled under a sense of injury because the boy made no overtures. He would ask Rose no questions about him, but Dorothy had a way of imparting information without being pressed for it. Through her he heard that Edgar was making steady progress at the flying-school and that he had been living with Aunt Polly ever since he left home. It was evident that Aunt Polly must be glorying in this her last and most triumphant score over him.

Once he met his son in the city. Edgar's hand went instantly to his hat, but Martin passed on without a sign. The grievance he nursed was like an aching tooth; he was forever conscious of it, feeling it with his tongue, as it were.

Harris was sent back to the marine-store business—he went gladly enough—and the “antiques” were sold off at a sacrifice. The loss preyed on Martin's mind. It was not the only one he had to endure. “Rosalia” was bringing him in very little. A new beverage had ousted it in the public taste. His parliamentary salary

and his dividends in Liversidge, Limited, were all he could count on now. Owing to the increase in the cost of living he found them barely enough for his expenses. He had anxieties too about Hemford. The General Election was only a year off, and he was by no means sure of being returned again there.

He was very irritable these days, and Rose proportionately patient. He never confided in her, so, whenever he showed a cold and frowning front, she attributed it to money worries and refrained from aggravating them by asking questions. In the matter of Ada she also kept her own counsel. On his part, Martin assiduously avoided the girl, putting off the day of reckoning, if it had to come. But the thought of it kept him awake at night.

Were Rose to know of it, he doubted whether she would actually leave him. Probably not while Dorothy remained at home. But she would never believe in him again. He dreaded the idea of exposing to her horrified eyes his feet of clay.

Then he suddenly missed Ada. A new parlor-maid waited at table. He felt as though a load of care had been lifted from his shoulders. He wanted to know what had become of Ada, but when it came to asking his courage failed him. Yet to avoid remarking on the change might look curious.

"Where's Ada? Got a holiday?" he at length managed to inquire in a casual tone, when Dorothy had gone to bed. Rose and he were on the veranda. It was very hot indoors, and he was glad of the outdoor coolness and the kindly darkness. Rose drew her chair a little nearer to his.

"I've been wondering whether I ought to tell you,"

she said in a troubled voice; "but I decided there was no need unless you asked. Do you ask?"

"Well, if it's anything I should know," he fenced.

"Ada's gone away for several months. I thought it best. Of course you've been too busy to notice, but she's been looking ill. Martin, can't you guess?"

Martin decided it was wisest to be dense.

"Don't talk in conundrums, my dear," he said.

"She's going to have a baby," Rose whispered.

"Don't be shocked or angry, please, darling. Poor girl! She's so sorry and unhappy. I'm as sorry for her as I can be. So I—I said I'd look after her and take her back if she couldn't get married."

She tried to peer into his face, but the darkness hid it from her.

"What did she say to that?" he asked quickly.

"She was very grateful, but she seemed dazed. She's so young—poor little thing!"

"And you're helping her?"

"I must. Don't prevent me. I'll squeeze it out of my dress money, somehow."

"You can't do that." Even Martin's skin was not thick enough to let Rose's money go to pay the wages of his sin. He cleared his throat. "After all, the girl has been a good servant, and you're certainly the best judge as to whether she's deserving or not. What are you paying her?"

"Ten shillings a week."

"Well—you can count on me for it. Don't take it out of your own money."

Rose groped for his hand. "You dear, generous darling!" she exclaimed.

Martin's cane chair creaked as he shifted uncomfortably in it.

"Oh, well, my dear——"

"You've a heart of gold," came Rose's worshipping voice out of the darkness. "And I actually thought you might be annoyed with me."

"Annoyed?" He squeezed her hand. "You're a little brick."

Praise of any kind from him was as unusual as it was unexpected. It fell on her parched soul like water in a desert. She kept her hand in his and sat on clasping it tightly. It seemed to her in this quiet hour that she and Martin were in very close communion.

The long silence that fell upon them was broken by Martin. A weight was beginning to lift from his mind. It seemed highly likely that the unpleasant incident was going to end satisfactorily—in oblivion. But he would like to make sure.

"I suppose you don't know—she didn't give you any indication as to who—the culprit was?"

"No." Rose hesitated. "I think he must be a married man. She feels very bitter about it." After a pause she added: "I didn't press her to confide in me. It's such a delicate matter. She must have her reasons——"

"Quite so, quite so. And besides, servants, even good servants, are so addicted to lying. You're a very wise woman, Rose."

"Love makes one wise, I think," Rose answered softly.

XXXII

TEA ON THE TERRACE

DO you know that man, father? He keeps on looking at us."

Martin followed the direction of Dorothy's glance. At a little distance from them (they were having tea on the terrace of the House of Commons) sat a clean-shaven, youthfully dressed man of fifty. He had thin lips and a bald head. Dorothy thought he looked rather unpleasant. That, and his fixed gaze at herself and Martin, had riveted her attention.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"That's Sir Abel Main. No. I—er—don't exactly know him."

He wished he did. Main was a member of the very rich and influential class to which Gammel and Liver-side belonged, but better educated, more influential, and socially a cut above them. *Bon viveur*, and possessed of a worldly type of geniality, he had plenty of friends among the more easy-going members of the House. Martin's rigidity had always precluded intimacy with this set. He was hardly on nodding terms with Sir Abel. The latter, moreover, had a nose for men of Martin's stamp. He assiduously avoided them. Yet, just now, he was patently trying to catch Martin's eye.

"I'm sure he wants to speak to you," said Dorothy. She was beginning to feel uncomfortable under the

stare which the stranger was directing at her as well as at Martin.

"I don't think so, surely." Martin looked up again, and as he did so Main rose and came up to their table.

"How d'you do?" he said, with easy effrontery. "I've been wanting to congratulate you on your criticism of the Navy Estimates the other night. May I join you?" He glanced at Dorothy for consent.

"Pray do," said Martin, trying not to look too gratified. The criticism referred to had been nothing but one of the shallow and obstructive questions which he periodically indulged in as a protest against any form of martial expenditure and in order to see his name mentioned in debate. That it had been contemptuously ignored by the Minister to whom it was addressed was too much of a commonplace to upset his equanimity. "Pray do," he repeated effusively. "My daughter—Sir Abel Main."

Dorothy acknowledged the introduction with an amiable smile and a flash of white teeth that detracted nothing from her good looks. Sir Abel's eyes missed none of these, but his controlled expression was that of a man who had just seen her for the first time and had not been almost knocked off his feet by her prettiness.

"I had no idea you possessed a grown-up daughter," he said affably. "I don't think I can have met you anywhere, Miss Leffley, or surely I should remember you. Perhaps you have only come out this year."

"Oh, I'm not a society girl," she laughed. "We haven't the money for a triumphal début, have we, father?"

Martin thought her tomboy frankness unnecessary, and the admission of want of money a tactless remark. He regretted having brought her down to the House.

It was a treat he gave her seldom enough, but he wished he had deferred it on this occasion. To have been alone to respond to Main's gratifying overtures would, he felt, have been far more advantageous. His self-esteem prevented him from perceiving that Dorothy and not himself was responsible for the rich man's friendly advances. He appreciated that she looked very nice in a sprigged muslin arrangement and a babyish shady hat, but that she should have bewitched a man of the world was altogether beyond him. And inwardly he was on tenterhooks as to what she might do or say next. He deemed it essential to say something to discount her impulsiveness.

"Dorothy is rather a serious young person," he explained. "I don't think an aimless life would suit her at all."

"Really?" smiled Sir Abel. "If I may say so, Miss Leffley, you look too charming to have any very serious leanings."

"Thanks awfully," said Dorothy. "That means my dress is a success. I made it myself. Yes, honestly! That's a proof of seriousness, isn't it? Besides, I do work in the house. I shelled peas for dinner before I came out. And then there's my painting. Oh, there's lots to do in life!"

Main liked her spirited artlessness. It accentuated her physical charms. It seemed odd to him that a calculating and pushing person like Leffley should have such an unsophisticated daughter. Unsophistication in good-looking girls had special allurements for him.

"You interest me," he said. "Art is one of my relaxations. I have quite a good collection of old pictures. Perhaps you have heard of them. You must

come and see them one day. But I would like to impose a condition."

"What condition?"

"That you let me see some of your own work first."

"Oh, my work! It's so piffing at present. I only copy old masters. It makes one rather slick. And of course it's awfully good training for one's taste. Daddy and I do a regular trade."

Martin suddenly found the air of the Terrace uncomfortably warm. He must stop Dorothy's tongue at all hazards. A frown contracted his brows and he tried to catch her eye, but he only caught Main's. The twinkle of derision in it made him look away quickly. He prayed that Dorothy's indiscreet admissions might not arouse more than amusement in the man's mind.

"What sort of a trade?" The tone in which Main asked the question sounded innocent enough, but its object was to pump the girl.

"Oh, faking! I paint an old master on old canvas and we buy an old frame. Then Daddy does the rest. Where do you sell them, Daddy?"

"Privately, privately," Martin rapped out hurriedly. "Only you mustn't let Sir Abel think you mean faking in the dishonest sense. That would be giving a very wrong impression."

"It wasn't my impression at all," was Sir Abel's disclaimer. "I'm quite sure Miss Leffley would not take any one in. But you would," he added to himself. He turned to Dorothy again. "Do you know, it's quite a coincidence. I have actually been inquiring for some one like yourself to make copies of one or two of my pictures down at Chister Castle. I wonder if you would care to——"

"She would be delighted!"

Martin jumped at the invitation. It was like a god-send after his fears.

Dorothy nodded. "Of course I should. But I advise you to see my work first."

"I'll do that with pleasure. Have you a studio?"

"You should see it! I paint in my bedroom. It looks an awful mix-up sometimes!"

Martin's ears smarted. He could never account for the awful transparency of his children.

"Dorothy is only using her bedroom pending the building of a studio. By the way, there's a portrait of myself in my study at home. Any time you care to see it——"

"No time like the present. Can we go now? My car is outside."

"Certainly."

Martin called a waiter and paid for the tea. He also tipped the man a sixpence, fourpence more than he had intended. He thought the occasion warranted it. He had made an influential acquaintance who was going to commission Dorothy. That might be worth a considerable sum. Besides, a free ride home would save him eighteenpence.

"I'm afraid you're a hustler," teased Dorothy, as Sir Abel followed her into the landaulet and took the seat beside her. Martin faced them. It seemed to her that the castle-owner kept rather close to her. It made her feel a little uncomfortable. Their knees touched. She moved hers away, but presently they touched again.

"A hustler? Not exactly. But I always know what I want," answered Sir Abel, looking steadily at her.

XXXIII

THE PRICE OF A COMMISSION

IT'S a rum go," remarked Mrs. Peacock. "And I don't like the look of it either. There's something fishy somewhere."

Fresh herrings were cooking for Edgar's supper, and their odor permeated the small house, but the reference was not to the fish.

"Hadn't you better begin from the beginning, old dear?" suggested Edgar.

"Yes. P'r'aps I had. Your sister's just been and gone. Regular fairy story she had to tell. Yesterday they was having tea—her and Martin—outside Parliament, when they got into talk with Sir Abel Somebody. Sort of millionaire, I gather. They gets chatting about art—trust your father for that—and take him off home, if you please, to show him Dolly's pictures. And the long and the short of it is that Dolly's to copy three of his old masters down at a castle of his at a hundred pounds apiece! Pretty stiff, I call it. Why, Sargent wouldn't get much more for makin' copies."

Edgar sat up. "That's extraordinary," he said. "Who fixed the price?"

"Martin, I'll lay. And Dorothy's to go down there this very week-end. To-morrow, that is, by the ten-something from Paddington."

"Where?"

"To this here castle. Chester or Chister was the name."

"With mother, of course?"

"No." Aunt Polly looked hard at Edgar. "What d'you think of that?"

"Well, she *can't* go then—naturally. Father wouldn't dream of it, surely."

"He's not dreamin'. He ain't even asleep, but he's sendin' her there all the same. What d'you know about this Sir Abel what's-his-name?"

"Sir Abel Main? Is that it?" Edgar looked thoughtful. "Not much good."

"H'm. Go on."

"You see, Aunt Polly, down at the flying ground one meets men of all sorts and one hears about others. I've heard this about Sir Abel—he's no good to women. There was something about a tea-shop lately. Pretty near the bone, they say it was. Well, he was in that, though it didn't come out in the papers. If you ask me, he's a regular bad egg. If Dolly's going down to his place, mother must go there too. That's all there is to it. Girls can't stay in men's houses, alone, even to paint pictures. It isn't done. The governor knows that."

"I wonder Rose wasn't asked. When there's money in the air your father fair loses his head. My opinion is, he's just chancin' things—happenin' to Dorothy, I mean. I'm speakin' plain, Edgar."

"I'm going to speak plainly too. I'm not going to see my sister made cheap. Even if the man was straight, which he isn't, it would be doing for her reputation if it got about. Perhaps I'd better see mother first."

"I shall be surprised if that's any good."

"Then I shall talk to father."

"I expect you'll have to," said Aunt Polly dryly.

Edgar had not set foot in his father's house since he had been turned out of it. He did not relish the idea of going there now, but he put his pride in his pocket for his sister's sake. The affinity of twinship would have been enough to make him champion her at any time. Now he was moved to do so for an additional reason. Her innocence seemed to be in danger. Brotherly solicitude magnified his fears. He boiled with indignation at the thought of her running such a risk. The full facts of the situation were unknown to him, but that it should have arisen at all appeared to be his father's fault. He was in a white heat of exasperation when he reached the house.

His luck was out. Neither his mother nor Dorothy was at home. It followed that his father must be bearded. He went straight to his room. Martin was disconcerted by the unexpected visit.

"What has brought you here?" he demanded, determined not to concede anything the boy might have come to ask.

"I don't want anything for myself," retorted Edgar. "And I've not come for pleasure. I've come to ask if it's true that Dorothy's going down to stay at a man's house alone. Also if it's true that she's to be paid a suspiciously large sum of money for going."

Martin almost jumped out of his chair.

"You impertinent young jackanapes!" he spluttered. "How dare you come and ask questions like that? Are you my keeper?"

"I've got to be my sister's keeper if you won't," Edgar rejoined hotly. "So it's true. Well, then, father,

all I want to say is that if you let Dorothy go away like that you're—you're not fit to be a father. I dare-say I *am* beastly young to say that, and I hate having to. But I'm old enough to know that men like Main mean no good to young girls, and—damn it, sir, can't you see, you're simply chucking her at him?"

Martin pointed to the door.

"Do you see that?" he said, his voice shaking with passion.

"Yes; I'm going in a minute. Look here, father, I don't mean to be impertinent. I don't want to think hard things of you. It doesn't matter how you treat me. I'm tough and can stand it. But Dorothy's a girl, and I don't think you've any idea how absolutely dead innocent she is. D'you want her to find things out in the beastliest way?"

Edgar's insistence was mastering his father's obstinacy. Intolerable as Martin felt it to be called to account like this, he saw plainly that Edgar was not going to be put off by any intemperate show of authority. The case called for more subtle methods. In effect, Martin felt himself beaten, but he hid his defeat by a dignified counter-attack.

"You ought to know," he said, "that I put Dorothy's moral welfare before everything. For some abstruse reason, which is quite beyond me, you take an exactly opposite view of my motives. No doubt you mean well. I'll give you credit for so much. I should like to make it plain to you that Sir Abel Main is greatly impressed with Dorothy's work and is prepared to pay her well for it. Do you suppose that I am going to stand in her light? You wrong me. In your impetuosity you do not even realize that Dorothy will not need

a chaperon at Chister Castle, for the simple reason that no one will be there except the housekeeper and servants. Sir Abel tactfully laid stress on that and on the fact that Dorothy would therefore be able to give herself unrestrainedly to the work. And if this is not enough for you, you must realize that Sir Abel is an elderly man—more than old enough to be Dorothy's father."

Edgar snorted. "And don't you know, father, that elderly men of his sort are walking horrors when they happen to get keen on a girl? Elderly men of a certain type *do* think of young girls and—prey on them. It's true. Oh, all right, I'm off."

He left the house, boiling with indignation.

"I didn't think it would be any use," Mrs. Peacock commented when he reported the interview.

"The only thing I can do is to write to Dorothy herself," was the decision Edgar came to.

His letter arrived as she was preparing for her departure. When she had read it she handed it to Rose. Edgar had not the gift of lucid expression, but Rose could read the brotherly solicitude between the lines. Did she not feel a little anxious herself?

"DEAREST D.,

"I went to see father. It's rot your going down alone. Don't go without mother. Make mother go. I wish you knew more about things, or you'd smell a rat. Be careful. No man, who is keen on a girl decently, puts her in a compromising position. Don't be a little ass. If mother can't go with you, d—— the money and stop at home. Do, old girl.

"EDGAR.

"P.S.—Aunt P. agrees with every word, and you know there are no flies on her."

"Oh, dear!" said Rose. "I wish I could come with you. But Edgar must be mistaken, or Daddy wouldn't let you go."

"We shall miss the train if we don't start."

Martin came in to say the same thing. He seemed anxious to get Dorothy out of the house. Perhaps he was afraid that Edgar or Aunt Polly might turn up and prevent her going. Aunt Polly was quite capable of creating a scene.

"Take care of yourself, my dear," he said as he kissed her.

"Yes, Daddy," said Dorothy, and wondered a little why Aunt Polly and dear old Edgar, and even her mother, should think this business trip a mistake. Who was right, they or her father?

She was really an amenable girl. Left to herself, she would have reasoned the matter out and thought little of the money at issue. But Martin was not to be trifled with. If she did not go she would offend him, and perhaps Sir Abel as well, with whom he wanted to keep in. She had gathered so much. Had she refused to go a stop might have been put to her art studies, to say the least of it. And then, of course, it was rather fun to go down to an old castle and spend one's time amongst splendid pictures in beautiful surroundings. . . . She had almost forgotten Edgar's note by the time she and Rose reached the station. The train was on the point of starting.

"Remember what Daddy said," Rose enjoined at the carriage window. "Look after yourself, darling. I do wish you weren't going, somehow," she added.

The train began to move. Rose stepped back from the window and waved a last good-by, then turned at

the sound of running feet. Towards her came Edgar, kit-bag in hand, tearing along the platform.

"Which carriage?" he panted.

"That one—second-class!" cried Rose.

"Right! Good-by, mother. Don't let on to the governor." He wrenched open the carriage door and swung himself in. "Hullo, Dolly! I'm coming too."

His cyclonic irruption into the compartment filled her with delighted surprise.

"Really?" she exclaimed. "All the way? How ripping! But—what will father say?"

Edgar shrugged. "He can't say more than he has. Anyway, it's too late to bother about that now." He settled himself in the seat opposite her. The train roared through a couple of short tunnels. "The question is, what will the great Sir Abel Main's face look like when he sees me?"

"He won't be there to see you. But do you mean you're coming to the Castle too?"

"That was the idea."

Dorothy looked puzzled. "I suppose it will be all right. What a funny letter you wrote me."

"It wasn't meant to be funny. Some one had to tell you. Never mind that now. I'm here and I'm going to look after you. At the last moment I decided I ought to come. Awful rush I had, too. How are things at home? Governor on the rampage?"

"Not a bit. He's been lovely to me lately. He's going to invest the money I shall get for the pictures, and I'm to have twenty-five whole pounds of it to spend on clothes!" Dorothy waxed enthusiastic. "And I'm to have a studio. Do you know, I'm beginning to think we've never really understood father."

Edgar looked out of the window.

With their limited experience of country seats, the twins were deeply impressed by their first view of Chister Castle. They had seen Windsor and Hampton Court, and also Hatfield House at a discreet distance; but this was the first occasion on which they had driven in as visitors at the ornate gates of a Norman castle adapted as a country-house to the uses of a millionaire.

In the limousine that had been sent to meet them, they rolled up the vast tree-bordered drive, getting glimpses of shaven lawns and vistas of landscape gardening on a scale hitherto unknown to them. The imposing dimensions of the Castle and the gray majesty of its Keep roused Dorothy to enthusiasm.

"Isn't it lovely! Isn't it perfect!" she exclaimed. "Just like olden times! It only wants a figure or two strolling about in armor and things to make it——"

"Well, there's a figure in shooting rig. At least, that's what I suppose it is," interrupted Edgar, whose eyes had detected some one standing before the main entrance. "Left his suit of mail indoors on account of the heat, I expect," he added facetiously.

"It's Sir Abel!" she declared. "He must have come down on purpose to—to make me feel at home!"

"I shouldn't wonder," observed Edgar dryly.

The car stopped. Sir Abel opened the door.

"Welcome!" he said gayly; and then his face changed on discovering that she was not alone.

"How d'you do?" Dorothy returned shyly. "Sir Abel, this is my brother, Edgar."

As a self-invited guest, Edgar felt at a disadvantage,

but he had already discounted the awkwardness of the meeting, and showed no discomposure.

"My mother couldn't manage to bring my sister down," he said, "so I came instead."

Sir Abel's face cleared.

"Quite natural she should like some one to look after her on a long journey. You'll stay to dinner, of course? There's a very good train back at nine-thirty. You'll easily be able to catch it."

"Will you?" Edgar asked amiably.

Sir Abel had started to lead the way indoors. He swung round to scrutinize Edgar. But the boy's face told him nothing. It looked devoid of guile.

"I have business down here," he answered, hardly hiding the annoyance he was beginning to feel. "I may have to remain a day or two."

"Oh, that's all right. I can stay as long as my sister needs me. I suppose you have no married lady stopping in the house, Sir Abel? Of course, if you have, I could catch the nine-thirty."

The question incensed Sir Abel. It also put him in a quandary. He could not mistake the boy's intention to play a man's part on his sister's behalf.

His inclination was to act summarily with him, to pack him off without more ado. But he did not know how Dorothy would take it. He was particularly anxious not to offend her. She seemed quite unconscious of the undercurrent of antagonism that was brewing under her eyes. Apparently she had no idea that her brother's presence was the very last thing her host desired. Much to his disgust, Sir Abel saw that the only thing left for him to do was to disarm any suspicions the boy might be harboring.

"No; unfortunately I have no lady visitors at all," he said. "So if you prefer to stop, pray do so. Chaperons are only *de rigueur* in suburban circles nowadays, I understand. Still, so long as your sister isn't disturbed at her painting . . . She has come, as you know, primarily, on business," he added pointedly.

It was the sort of reminder that no one but a man of coarse fiber would have made. Rancor instigated it. He wanted to make it clear that Dorothy was not so much a guest as a temporary employee, and that he expected her brother to bear the distinction in mind, and behave accordingly. The remark incensed Edgar. It convinced him that Sir Abel believed that his money could buy anything, that he had priced his sister in with her work.

"We all seem to be here on business," he said with a touch of sarcasm.

"Indeed? And what is yours?" inquired Sir Abel insolently.

"Oh, nothing pressing—unless the need arises. I suppose it might be called the business of a gentleman," said Edgar.

XXXIV

THE COMMERCIAL VALUE OF A PRETTY WOMAN

THE keenness which he invariably displayed about any project dear to his heart made Edgar a very efficient watch-dog. Without obtrusiveness he exercised a vigilance over Dorothy which gave Sir Abel few opportunities of carrying out any sinister designs against her. And he did it with an air of bland innocence which the millionaire found it difficult to resent openly. He sought in vain for an excuse to shorten the boy's visit. With no woman-chaperon provided for Dorothy, he had a legitimate right to stay on.

After the first day or two Edgar was frankly bored. The change from the active life of an aerodrome to sitting still in a picture gallery (with the smoking of innumerable cigarettes as his only distraction) was a trying one. And yet there was nothing for it but to stick it out. Sir Abel did his best to rid himself of the incubus. He offered his car: Edgar politely declined it; a gun: Edgar didn't shoot; a trout-rod: Edgar didn't fish. Sir Abel regretted he hadn't a monoplane (of peculiarly unreliable construction) on the premises, though the probabilities were that Edgar would have declined that too.

With nothing to distract her, Dorothy painted assiduously, copying a half-length Hoppner. All Sir Abel could do was to sit by her moodily at intervals. Talk

of the intimate kind which he had promised himself was out of the question in the presence of an undesirable third person who shared their talks, their walks, their meals and every interval of leisure.

A week of this sort of thing was enough for him. He was "fed up" with Edgar. He also came to the conclusion that to pay a hundred pounds apiece for copies which he did not particularly want, and at the same time be deprived of a diversion which he ardently desired, was a waste of good money. His pursuit of the feminine had never before been made under similar difficulties. Dorothy gave him no encouragement. Edgar was maddeningly obtuse—or artful. He felt he was being fooled. Once that notion got into his head he thought it time to come to an understanding with the girl. He waited until she had completed her copy of the Hoppner. Then he sent for her and presented her with a check for the stipulated amount. She took it diffidently.

"Thank you very much," she said; "but you needn't have paid me until the other two were done."

A silver paper-knife lay on the table between them. Its handle was in the form of a nude female figure. He picked it up and rather obtrusively trifled with it.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," he said slowly, "but I have had to reconsider my offer. One picture will be sufficient."

"Oh, dear!" The exclamation was involuntary. "Daddy will be vexed."

"I hope not."

"Oh, but he will. Do tell me, please. Is it because my work is not as good as you thought?"

"It has nothing to do with your work. Come, now,

don't look so baffled. You're a dear little girl and all that, but you're Martin Leffley's daughter, and it would be surprising if you were quite guileless."

Dorothy's eyes grew round.

"Won't you explain?" she asked plaintively. "I must give Daddy some reason."

"I don't think your father will want much explanation if you tell him your brother has been here all the time."

"But I thought—— Then it's Edgar you object to?"

"Not in himself. He has some admirable qualities. One of them is pertinacity. I daresay I should admire it—in different circumstances. Only I can't get to know you very well while he's here, can I?"

"But I didn't know you wanted to get to know me. I thought it was—pictures."

"It wasn't only pictures. Don't you know that I could get all the copies I want for ten pounds each? Don't you know that I was offering you a fancy price?"

"It was generous, but—why did you offer it?"

"Because you're so pretty, and I thought it would be pleasant—for both of us—to have the place to ourselves."

The inflexion he gave the words put an unmistakable meaning into them. Like a hot wind it seared her modesty. Waves of color surged into her face. Sir Abel's eyes feasted on her, seeing a new attraction in her vivid looks. They prompted him to say more than he had intended. He held the paper-knife with its gleaming handle suggestively towards her.

"Why do you think I bought this? It's an expensive toy. Because it struck my fancy. Live things strike my fancy too, sometimes. You did."

"Yes! . . . But then you couldn't buy me."

"Couldn't I? Isn't it true, then, that every woman has her price? Perhaps you haven't thought much about the commercial value of being—a pretty woman. It's worth while, you know. It's as good as having a big sum of money to invest."

His tone, the look in his eyes, the expression of his sensual mouth, put her on her guard. But because she remained silent, he pursued his cruel enlightenment.

"It amounts to this, my dear. You can make more money in a year by your looks than your father could in ten by his brains. Let me prove it to you. Send that young brother of yours away and you can ask for anything you want. You can have a pretty little house and a studio in St. John's Wood, and a handsome allowance. What would you say to that?"

Dorothy stood very still. Every bit of color had drained out of her face.

"I never cared much about novels," she said slowly. "They seemed so impossible and unreal—most of them. In some of them the rich men—the blackguards and the beastly ones—talk like you do. I never took much notice of that either. They offer to—to keep girls, and give them furs and flats and motor-cars. And the girls in return give them something—and they're never happy afterwards. They end in smash and everything goes to pieces. . . . It used to amuse me—that rot. But now I know"—she was struggling to express herself—"there are such men and such girls, and it's true. And I know you've insulted me and I hate you. And I know why Edgar came, and why mother didn't seem quite happy in her mind. The only thing I don't know is how father could let me. . . . Put that beastly paper-

knife down. . . . You may be rich—a pig may have a nice sty—but if you only knew what you are! There's your money! Don't come near me; I'm going—*now!*"

He stood in her way, not at all put out of countenance by her disparaging opinion of him. Indeed, he rather liked her spirit. It made her all the more worth winning.

"Come, now! Don't be silly. You don't mean all that."

But she pushed past him and went out, slamming the door behind her. Making fast for the picture gallery where she had left Edgar, she came across one of the footmen.

"Tell a maid to pack my box and have it ready at once, please. And my brother's too," she stopped to say.

"Yes, miss. Would you like the car?"

"Is there a cab in the village? I would rather have that. In a quarter of an hour?"

At the end of the long corridor she met Edgar on his way to find her.

"Come on," she panted. "We're going. I shall suffocate if I stop in this house. I'll just get my hat——"

Edgar did not stop to ask questions. Her white face and excited manner made it clear to him that the very thing he had come down to shield her from had happened.

"The dirty cad!" he muttered to himself.

They waited in the grounds until the hired cab came for them. Sir Abel kept out of sight. Neither on the way to the station nor in the train did Dorothy say more than that he had been rude to her, and Edgar was

thankful that she refrained from details. As it was, he could only with difficulty restrain voicing his savage resentment against the man who had insulted his sister. Unpleasant hours they were, spent in moody silence; but they were compensated for by the relief both felt at having shaken free of Chister Castle and its owner.

As the train drew in at Paddington Dorothy bent forward and kissed Edgar.

"Thank you for being with me, twin," she said fervently.

Edgar got a little red. "Oh, that's all right," he mumbled. "There are some sweeps about in this world. I warned father. You'll have to take a taxi with that box."

He put her in one and then took the Tube in another direction.

On getting home Dorothy went straight to her mother. All her pent-up feelings overflowed into those sympathetic ears. What she could not discuss with Edgar she could pour out to Rose. They were together a long time. Rose wanted to be the intermedium for conveying the news of Dorothy's return and its reason to Martin, but the girl insisted on doing this herself. The day's happenings had entirely changed her feelings towards him. Nothing he could do or say now would ever make her afraid of him again.

"I've come back," she said composedly, as she shut the study door behind her. "I did one copy of a Hoppner for Sir Abel and he gave me a check for it. I returned it because of something he said. I daresay you can guess what. He seemed to think *you* knew why he had offered me such a big price." Her cheeks burnt.

"Never send me away like that again, father. I didn't think it of you."

Martin could not face the accusation in her eyes.

"What do you mean?" he shuffled.

Dorothy's head took a disdainful lift. "If you don't understand, ask mother. I've just come from her."

She turned to go.

"One moment." Martin spoke sharply. "Do you mean to tell me that you've simply washed your hands of the whole commission?"

"Not exactly; but Sir Abel didn't want the other two copies done when he found out I wasn't—what he imagined. He only gave me a check for the one I had done."

"Where is the check?"

"I told you. I gave it back to him."

"You will have to write for another."

"I wouldn't dream of it."

"Then I shall write for you."

"I won't touch his money."

Martin took no exception to that.

"You are behaving most irrationally," he continued. "From what you have said I gather Sir Abel showed that he was slightly attracted by you."

Dorothy's lips curled. "If you like to put it that way."

"And you, instead of behaving like a sensible girl, lost your temper. Quite apart from the harm you have done your own pocket, you cannot be unaware that you have put an end to all possible intimacy between Sir Abel and myself. After this exhibition of your ingratitude to me and your rudeness to an influential man,

I take no further interest in your art. So far as I am concerned, your studies are at an end."

"They're not the only thing that has come to an end," she rejoined in a dead voice. "There's my respect for you. That's gone too."

"Your opinion of me is not of the slightest importance," he said coldly, and turned away.

He was bitterly disappointed and extremely nettled. To give him his due, he did not realize that Dorothy had been the attraction to Sir Abel. Blinded by his own self-esteem, he had taken all the credit for it to himself. He had to admit that perhaps at Chister Castle Dorothy's youth and looks may have made an impression on its rich owner. Youth and good looks were apt to appeal to a man of mature age. Ada had affected Martin himself like that. He could not exactly blame Sir Abel. But he did blame Dorothy for playing her cards badly. It was obvious that in some way she must have ruined her chances by her inexperience. She might have succeeded in marrying the man. He wondered what sort of proposition Sir Abel had made her. He discounted her implied suggestion that it was an insulting one. Coming from a man of his wealth and importance, it was absurd of her to take offense, whatever it was. Had she been reasonably wide-awake she ought to have been able to turn it to advantage. Instead of that she had spoiled a good prospect of securing a millionaire husband, and also thrown away three hundred pounds. He had nothing but contempt for such unworldliness.

The question was, could he do anything to retrieve the situation? He might apologize to Sir Abel for his daughter's conduct, but he doubted the wisdom of doing

so. Perhaps it would be more dignified to appear ignorant of any misunderstanding. . . . There was always a chance it might blow over. . . . But concerning that check for a hundred pounds. . . . Dorothy's refusal to take it in a fit of temper could not alter the fact that it was due to her for work done. Sir Abel could not fail to see that.

Martin picked up a pen and wrote a nice little letter, asking for it. Its wording gave the impression that Dorothy had forgotten to take it, and that the writer was quite ignorant of any reason why she should not have done so.

He felt better after that.

XXXV

ROSE CONSULTS A SPECIALIST

ROSE had no idea she could feel so calm. Diffidence, if not timidity, had always been one of her failings. Yet, full of misgivings though she was about her health, she faced the specialist in his somber consulting-room without nervousness. She feared his verdict but meant to endure it stoically. Only a self-denying nature could have shown such fortitude. Whatever it might be it would, she reasoned, only concern herself. For herself Rose was never afraid.

"I want you to be quite open with me," she said, when she had detailed her symptoms. "I know there is something wrong, so whatever you may say, it will not frighten me."

The doctor asked questions.

"You must have been feeling ill for a considerable time," he said at length. "Why have you delayed consulting a medical man?"

For all Rose's simplicity she could sometimes read an unexpressed thought.

"You mean I've left it too long?"

"Unwisely so."

"Is there a remedy?"

"The usual one."

"An operation?"

"Yes; but it would be dangerous. A complete cure is remote in any case, I'm sorry to say."

"I see." She thought for a little. "Shall I be able to hide it?"

"It depends on the sort of life you lead. If you could have absolute quiet, freedom from all worry, and especially country air, the malady might not develop dangerously for some years."

"The country? Unfortunately our home is in London. We are seldom able to leave it." Unostentatiously she placed his fee on the table and rose to go. "I haven't the least doubt that what you say is correct," she said. "The only thing is, I must forego the operation and—hope for the best. One can always do that, can't one?"

Her smile was the most heroic thing the specialist had seen for a long time.

From Wimpole Street she went straight home. She wanted to think. Up in her bedroom she shut and locked her door. It was the first time in her life that she had put a lock between herself and her loved ones. But just for a little while she needed privacy. She took off her hat and smoothed her hair. The tidings she had brought home were not written in her face. She was thankful she had such a high color. Martin never looked beyond that. In his estimation if one had a good color one was well.

Ought she to tell him? She could not decide whether it was her duty or not. He had enough cares on his shoulders without her adding to them. Dear Martin! Because he was so dear the contemplation of having to part from him brought a pang to her heart. A few more years together at most and then . . . What would he do without her? . . . What *would* he do? Never

before had she regretted being indispensable to him. She did now. Perhaps—in the time she had left—she might somehow teach him to do without her. She would like him to feel sorry if she died. But only sorry, not inconsolable. . . .

She knelt down by the side of the bed and prayed. She prayed with all her strength—for strength. She prayed to the God who had never failed her, who had given her the priceless gift of a loving and devoted husband, that in some way, God's own good way, He would spare her as long as possible to Martin, on whom her loss would fall so heavily. She prayed that if it were possible the cup might pass from her: not as *she* willed but as God willed. . . .

And then the pain came, sharper than any spiritual pangs, the knife-like agony that had been growing more acute for months and at last had driven her to the specialist. When it had abated she got up and unlocked the door. Martin stood there.

"I've been looking for you," he said. "Have you been out?"

"Yes, dear."

"You haven't forgotten we're going to the opening of the new wing of the Cancer Hospital at three, and to dinner with the Witts at eight? You may have to speak a few words at the hospital."

"I hadn't forgotten, Martin. I shall be ready."

"Look your best, old lady." He rested his hand on her shoulder for a moment. "You know, your robust appearance is very inspiring at functions of that sort."

"Is it, dearest? I'm afraid I shall never get really used to them."

"Perhaps you won't have to."

He sat down rather heavily in the chair by the dressing-table. She noticed how old and tired he looked.

"Are you worrying about anything?" she asked, with ever-ready sympathy.

"In a way, yes. I don't like the look of things. I haven't for a long time."

She might have taken his words to apply to her illness, but she knew he had no inkling of it. He was thinking politically. "Those Sarajevo murders are going to lead to trouble, I believe. Did you see the paper this morning?"

"Yes, but I didn't read much. I—I was bothered about something else. Is the news bad?"

"Yes, not only that, but there were a lot of significant rumors going about the House last night. There's talk of war—Austria and Russia, perhaps Germany. That would set Europe in a blaze." Martin brought his hand down violently on the dressing-table. "It's this cursed militarism! We've been nearly dragged into war by it already."

"But you don't think we——"

"I don't know. Every Jingo in the country would be glad if we joined in. Some of the Opposition papers are hinting at it already. It's disgraceful! I loathe war! It's so bad for trade."

"If that's all," said Rose, to whom the prospect of war seemed remote enough, "why should you worry? You're not in trade now. The antique business, I mean."

Martin sighed. "It's not only that. This Parliament only has another eighteen months to run. If I don't get in again—and I've reason to think I may not

—I shall have nothing but my Liversidge dividends to live on; and that practically would mean ruin.”

“Martin!”

“Well, perhaps not quite that. But we should have to give up this house and go back to the same position we were in twenty years ago. Dorothy would have to do something for herself. Judging by her behavior lately, that’s what she is asking for,” he added bitterly.

“Poor Dolly! Martin, I wish you and she were better friends. If only you had explained to her the other day, when she asked you for her dress money, that you really couldn’t afford it just then! You only make her think you’re thwarting her purposely. There aren’t many girls in her position who haven’t one ball-dress. And she had set her heart on this dance. It’s to-night, and she can’t go.”

He made an impatient gesture. “I don’t need reminding of that. She’s rubbed it in enough already. In any case, dress or no dress, I should have set my face against it on account of its being an artists’ affair.”

“But, Martin, if she has to make money by painting——”

“She won’t. Who is to sell her pictures for her? You can’t expect me to encourage her after the ridiculous way she behaved at Chister Castle. To go back to what I was talking about—the future. Think of our having to keep up our position on three hundred a year at the most! Think of it! I don’t know how it strikes you, Rose, but to me it’s an appalling prospect.”

It would have amazed him to know that, far from daunting her, it was a prospect at which she almost rejoiced. To her frugal mind £300 a year was more

than enough to live on. For herself she could have asked nothing better. A return to the position of twenty years ago! The condition of life she had never ceased to miss! Was this God's answer to her prayers? No, it could not be, since such a change would make Martin unhappy. She must not even hunger for it. Yet, if only he could see things with her eyes, be contented with a little!

"Don't you think we could be happy like that?" she asked wistfully. "We're not as young as we were, Martin. Would it not in some ways be a relief to live more simply—to be just ourselves?"

He shook his head. "You can't expect me to see it like that. My whole life has been a struggle to get on in the world. To feel that it has all been waste work is dreadful. I haven't deserved such disappointment. I can't reconcile myself to it—to ending my days in obscurity."

"Oh, Martin, dear, please don't take it like that. It's hard on you, I know, after all you've done. But I feel—I'm sure—we could live contentedly on a small income if we tried."

Her tone of sincerity almost gave him courage to face the dismal future.

"You really mean you wouldn't mind?" he asked in real surprise.

"Mind?" A joyous little laugh punctuated by a sob broke from her. "Why, with you, dear, to share it, I wouldn't mind a garret! I could be utterly happy in a little country cottage, amongst dear, simple people in whose day nothing more important happens than the rising and setting of the sun—people who are happy because they don't know what ambition is. Ambition and

publicity and titles don't help one to be contented, Martin." Her voice was full of fervent pleading. "Think of it, dear; nothing to do but to keep a little house and garden looking neat and tidy! And peace! I could *die* happy like that!"

Martin passed his hand wearily across his eyes. For one fleeting, unpleasant moment he had an unaccountable fancy that a third person was in the room with them—a mystical, unwanted Third.

"Don't talk about dying," he said gruffly. "I—I don't believe I could do without you now."

"Martin!" she choked.

XXXVI

DOROTHY LOSES A GLOVE

MARTIN'S share in the afternoon's ceremony at the hospital was not as prominent as usual. True, he made a speech, but his personal anxieties robbed it of point. For once in a way Rose eclipsed him. She was called upon to say a few words on behalf of the nursing staff, and instead of relying on the customary little set speech (which, with alterations, could be made to fit most occasions), she spoke at some length with an unexpected depth of feeling. Martin had never known her make such a moving address. One or two of the doctors present listened in wonder to the extraordinary but reticent accuracy with which she depicted the sufferings of cancer victims, and of the merciful treatment the new wing would afford them. Unseen by her, the specialist whom she had consulted that same morning was also present. He did not wonder. He understood.

On the way home Martin complimented her.

"You quite surprised me," he said. "Had you thought out what you were going to say beforehand?"

"No, dear. I felt very keenly, that's all," she answered. "Cancer is such a cruel, inscrutable disease."

"Well, I never heard any one speak so feelingly about a matter of which they could have no experience." He did not see the sudden tightening of her lips. "I hope you're not tired."

"Not very," she lied bravely. "It's all in the day's work."

"Directly we get in you had better lie down. I shall take a nap in my study."

But when she got in she did not lie down. She took two evening dresses out of her wardrobe and carried them to Dorothy's room.

"Darling, do you think you could manage with either of these?" she asked. "The black doesn't seem quite suitable, but the heliotrope isn't so bad."

Dorothy looked at them doubtfully. A number of her own dresses lay scattered about. She had been trying to adapt some of them, but without success.

"Thank you awfully, pet," she sighed, "but it's no good. Your things would just double round me. I'm resigned now more or less. Father says one must get used to disappointments. He does give one a lot of practice, though."

"Father is very worried. It's a question of money, darling."

"Oh, I daresay. It's always a question of money now with him. I'm rather fed up with it. He doesn't consider pleasure necessary for young people——" She broke off. "Mother, you do look fagged. Must you go out to-night? Can't we spend the evening quietly together?"

"I wish we could," Rose said regretfully. "I *am* tired. And we shan't be in till late."

"I shall go round to Aunt Polly's."

"Do, dear. Give my love to Edgar." She kissed Dorothy and went back to her room.

When her father and mother had left the house Dorothy went off too. Aunt Polly knew all about the

dress difficulty and Martin's objection to the dance. His strained relations with Dorothy were more than a fortnight old.

"I was hopin' you'd come," she said. "Got the ticket?"

"For the dance? Yes. It's still in my purse. But why?"

"'Cos I got an idea. It's not eight yet. What's to stop your going if you had a proper dress? I reckon Martin's overlooked the fac' that his aunt's a high-class wardrobe dealer. I've a costume upstairs that came from a titled lady's this morning that'll suit you a treat. Run up to my room and wait for me. Edgar, you whistle for a taxi when we're ready."

"Aunt Polly! You don't mean——" exclaimed Dorothy.

"Yes, I do. Ain't I your godmother? Well, now I'm goin' to do the pumpkin trick. Get along with you."

When she joined Dorothy in her bedroom her arms were full of clothing with the sheen of silk upon it. Her old face wore a crafty expression as she spread them upon the bed.

"Can't ask to wear anything better than what's been on a duchess's back just once," she observed. "You look on it as an omen, my girl. I've got everything you want here—silk stockings, shoes your size if you stick a bit of cotton-wool in the toe, and I shouldn't wonder if I'd a string of real pearls put away somewhere. I won't do you up myself because I was peelin' onions this evenin'."

Dorothy dressed without her aid. When she saw her reflection in the looking-glass she hardly knew herself.

The dress fitted her; it was good and expensive and looked new. Aunt Polly held out an opera cloak, perhaps a trifle less pristine.

"I don't believe Martin would know you," she crowed. "Here's gloves your size, six and a quarter. Be careful how you put 'em on. I bought a dozen at sixpence apiece because the thumbs was defective. Edgar!" She put her head outside the door. "Call the taxi!" She surveyed her handiwork with a pride for which she certainly had an excuse. "Ain't yer goin' to give me a kiss, Dolly?"

Dorothy nearly fell on her old brown neck.

"You dear!" she exclaimed. "I don't know how to thank you. And I feel so excited I don't care what happens! There will be ructions when I get back to-night! Shall I come here and change first?"

"No; that'd make you too late. Better go straight home. And you can keep those things for another time. Bless the child, you needn't strangle me! Do you think I don't understand? One can only be young once. Tell Martin so, if you like. He's never been young himself for half a minute."

"But suppose mother and father are in before me, and father refuses to let me in?"

"Don't think he'll dare do that. Leave a little before the dance is over. If there's trouble at home come straight back here. Here's the taxi now. Enjoy yourself and don't think about nothin' else." She hurried the girl downstairs and bundled her into the waiting vehicle. But she paid for it first. Aunt Polly could be very gentlemanly when she liked.

Back in the sitting-room with Edgar she rubbed her hands exultantly.

"Seems to me I'm always scorin' off Martin," she chuckled.

At eleven o'clock next morning an exceedingly good-looking young man stood on Mrs. Peacock's doorstep. She surveyed him through the curtain with approval. He was well dressed. The impression she got was that he looked somebody. Then the small servant brought in a card. In addition to the stranger's name—Mr. Claud Bastaple—it bore a well-defined thumb-mark, obviously not his.

Aunt Polly read it ruminatively. The name was a euphonious one. Of the addresses beneath it one was distinctly "high-class," the other that of a West-end club.

"Where is he?"

"I left him in the hall, mum."

"Show the gentleman in."

The gentleman came in. He was nervous—nervous of half-dressed, plain old Aunt Polly, and she liked him all the better for it.

"I'm afraid you will think I have come on a strange errand," he said with considerable hesitation; "but—I was directed here. I want to find the owner of this glove." He produced a long white kid glove and held it out.

"Thumb's split bad," she remarked. "I thought it would. Still, now you've brought it you can leave it."

"I don't think you quite understand," he said. "I am very anxious to return the glove myself in—in spite of the split thumb. Last night at a dance my partner dropped it. I didn't catch her name. You know the sort of casual way people are introduced. And the mu-

sic was going top speed. I meant to have asked her, of course, but she disappeared rather suddenly, and I was just left with the glove."

"H'm. I see. What did you do then?"

"I went to the makers in Bond Street, and they directed me here. I don't quite understand how——"

"How a young girl like the one you met last night could have anything to do with me?" supplied Aunt Polly. "It's a bit surprisin' on the face of it, I'll admit. She happens to be a relation. I sent her along to that dance last night and I'm responsible, so to speak, that she isn't trifled with."

"I assure you I don't want to trifle with anybody," Mr. Bastaple protested. "I want to meet her again, that's all. It's—it's important to me that I should."

Aunt Polly glanced at his card again. "One of your addresses is respectable enough," she observed; "but how about the club? I don't hold with them night places."

"Great Scott! The Savile isn't a night-club!" he declared with great amusement. "It's quite the opposite—rather dull and proper."

"Oh, I daresay. I don't doubt your word. But I got to be careful. In a manner o' speakin' my niece ain't your class. I'm her aunt, just as you see me, an' I'm no duchess."

"I'm sure you're a very good aunt and would possibly make an excellent duchess."

He had a winning way with him. Aunt Polly was a connoisseur of character as well as old clothes, and it seemed to her that the visitor was quite obviously the right stuff.

"S'pose you want me to be what they call a *de ex machine*," she remarked.

"Something like it," he admitted. "Will you?"

The Imp of Perversity was nudging her elbow. Why shouldn't she countenance friendly intercourse between Dorothy and so well-favored a young man? She already had his word for it that they had been introduced, presumably by somebody who knew them both. True, Martin would probably object, but that was all the more reason why she shouldn't consider him.

"If I do, you'd best keep my name out of it," she said, after a little thought. "Not that I mind, but her father and me aren't exactly bosom friends. He reckons himself somebody, and I'm the disreputable member of the family, you understand. I don't count. Only Dolly likes me. Dolly's no snob."

Dolly! Mr. Bastaple committed the name to memory. "Dorothy," he said aloud. "What else?"

"Dorothy Leffley, daughter of Sir Martin Leffley, M.P. Don't forget the 'Sir.' He can't. But if you'll take my advice you won't call at the house unless Dolly says so, else it might come out about this dance and other things. She went there last night without her father knowing, and got let in by the cook. Her brother was over there this morning and heard so. Tell you what. You know the Wallace Collection?"

"I fancy I've heard of it."

"Well, then, be there at three o'clock this afternoon, downstairs in the Sèvres Room. And now if you'll excuse me—it's washing-day. That's all right. I don't want any thanks—yet. You act on the square, that's all."

Just before dinner-time she went out to the nearest call-office and rang up the Leffley number.

"You the Tivoli? . . . Tell Miss Dorothy she's wanted. The name don't matter. . . . Say a friend. . . . All right, I'll hold the line." A minute of silence ensued. "Hello, that you, Dolly? Yes, Aunt Polly speakin'. I want you to meet me at the Wallace Collection at a quarter to three. Got somethin' nice to show you. . . . What? No, I haven't time to explain now. Mind, don't be late. Good-by."

They entered the Sèvres Room with five minutes to spare, but Mr. Bastaple was already there waiting for them. Dorothy had come expecting to be introduced to nothing more animate than a Watteau or a Fragonard to be copied for purposes of sale. Aunt Polly had refrained from mentioning the real object of their visit, and Dorothy did not therefore associate Mr. Bastaple's presence with it. She was certainly surprised to see him, and, as Aunt Polly noticed by the color that came into her cheeks, not a little pleased. For a young man who had shown the determination of a capable detective in tracking down his quarry by means of a stray glove he made his approach in quite a timorous manner.

"By Jove, this is jolly," he stammered. "I'm awfully glad to meet you again—Miss Leffley."

"So am I," blushed Dorothy. "Only I didn't expect—Aunt didn't say——"

She looked around, but Aunt Polly had disappeared. That discreet old woman was in the next room, leaning over a Louis XVI. marquetry clock in the attitude of one whispering some confidential pleasantry.

XXXVII

AN ILLUSTRATION IN CLASS DISTINCTIONS

WHEN want of success makes a man harbor a grievance against the world he always finds a means of venting his spleen on some inoffensive person. So with Martin. It manifested itself in petty irritability which he hardly tried to control. All the issues of his life, he felt, were coming to a head. An uncomfortable premonition of approaching disaster made his days intolerable. Conscience, perhaps, nascent but not yet fully awakened, was beginning to stir within him. He would not have admitted it for worlds, but he felt as though he were being dogged by a pursuing Nemesis from which there was no escape.

Instead of bracing himself to meet the strain of future calamity if it had to come, he expended all his nervous energy in bemoaning his fate and harassing other people. He could not help it. It was simply the outward expression of an inward and innate pettiness of soul. Martin had no appreciation of the eternal justice embodied in the phrase, "He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek."

All his spleen was vented on Dorothy. With the curtailment of her dress allowance, her simple pleasures stopped. He hardly ever spoke to her, and took no further interest in her concerns. Being high-spirited, she resented this treatment all the more because it was un-

deserved. She chafed, as so many girls before have chafed, for independence and the right to make her own life. Only consideration for her mother deterred her from insubordination.

Then, when things were at their worst, Aunt Polly had come to the rescue, and a dance had transformed her life. Her little romance was nothing out of the common. She could count the days of its golden glamor upon the fingers of her two hands. She had partially taken her mother into her confidence. Rose had even gone so far as to meet her lover, and had lunched with him and Dorothy at a West-end restaurant. So far, nothing of all this was imparted to Martin.

But Martin observed certain things for himself. Dorothy suddenly became proof against his bitterest shafts. She was always singing; she was out a great deal. There was a certain expression in her eyes, almost beatific. He remembered long ago to have seen it in Rose's—a queer, shining ecstasy which sometimes makes the man who sees it feel unworthy. Yes, Rose had looked like that, only he had never felt unworthy. He decided to watch Dorothy.

But he was saved the trouble. She came to him and divulged everything. Rose had offered to act as go-between, but Dorothy preferred to be her own mouth-piece, difficult as she expected to find it.

“Oh, well, father,” she finished up, after one or two floundering admissions, “Claud will explain things better than I can. He’s going to call. He wants to see you.”

“Does he?” said Martin, suddenly furious. “Why does he want to call? I don’t know him.”

"No," Dorothy hesitated. "You see, he's not quite—our sort."

That was enough for Martin.

"I see," he said sternly, though he did not see at all. "Well, I don't want you to bring that sort of person to my house. Do you understand?"

"But, father——"

Martin held up his hand.

"There is nothing to argue about. You tell me, you have met a young man and want to marry him. I don't ask his name. I had rather not hear it. It is sufficiently painful to know that he is not even, as you put it, our sort. In addition to this drawback, you tell me he is an artist with the ridiculously inadequate income of £250 a year. I won't dwell on what you might have done for yourself if you had behaved sensibly. All I have to say is that the matter must end here and now. I will not open my doors to undesirables, even though I have no very urgent wish to maintain you indefinitely."

"Oh, that'll do, father," Dorothy flashed out. "You needn't hurl a speech at me. What you've said let's me out, that's all. If you won't have Claud here I shall meet him somewhere else."

"Where?"

"In the street, I suppose. And tea-shops. In fact, anywhere I can."

"I won't have you behaving like a housemaid."

"Oh, I'll behave like a respectable one. I'll be in by ten o'clock."

"I forbid you to carry on in that illicit manner. If you don't care about your own position you must consider mine. We are not nobodies. If you happen to

have conceived a passion for the grocer's young man or somebody in that class of——”

“I wonder you can talk like that, father, especially to me. You know perfectly well that if I chose to fancy the grocer's young man I should not be marrying beneath me one little bit. He would be *my* class, because he's your class. We have no real social position. Even our servants know that. We *are* nobodies. I don't want to remind you of your beginning—that's Aunt Polly's specialty—but it isn't very tactful of you to sneer at the grocer's young man considering you've carried round groceries yourself. I don't say it's anything to be ashamed of. It would be fine if you were proud of it. Although we're nobodies, we needn't be snobs. You can't hide that you began life in a humble way. I haven't hidden it from Claud. I told him the day I first met him that we were just pure plebs——”

“Pure what?” gasped Martin.

“Pure plebeians. Aunt Polly was there to bear me out.”

“So that old woman is at the bottom of it,” he raged. “I'll go and see her—I'll——”

“I shouldn't. It wouldn't be the slightest use. There's nothing more to be said. You've never been exactly kind to us children. You've driven Edgar away, you know. Even the servants don't stop since faithful old Jane went. Only mother stays. All I can say is, I thank God you're not unkind to her.”

Martin had an uncomfortable conviction that what she said was true. Besides, it was no good bluffing Dorothy. Edgar had passed beyond his control. Dorothy was passing.

“That will do,” he said. “One day perhaps you

may realize how sorely you have tried me. If you persist in this idea of an unsuitable marriage I can only repeat that it will not be from my house. Nor can you expect to enter it afterwards. And please also understand that if I *have* sprung from a working-class family, I have severed all associations with it. You cannot, therefore, expect me or your mother to stoop to the lowly one you seem to prefer."

"No, I can't see you condescending. But I shouldn't speak for mother. She would stoop to pick a drowning fly out of a gutter. It wouldn't make any difference to her if I'd married a dustman except that she'd give him twopence extra every time he came round to the back door, bless her! That's mother! But I don't expect anything from you."

"I'm glad I have made my attitude clear," said Martin stiffly.

XXXVIII

NORLESSE OBLIGE

TEA was laid for three on the veranda. For weeks there had been no fourth cup. Rose was often painfully reminded of Edgar by its absence, as she was by the empty wicker chair to which he had been partial. To-day a second chair was unoccupied—Dorothy's. She was often out to tea now, and Rose took it for granted that she had gone somewhere with Claud Bastaple for the afternoon. She never mentioned the latter to Martin, nor had Martin referred to him since the day, now a fortnight ago, when Dorothy had had high words with him on the subject of her new acquaintance.

It was a hot day towards the end of July—the third Saturday of the month to be precise—and with nothing to take him down to Westminster, Martin was spending the afternoon at home, sleepily reading the paper in the shadiest corner of the garden. Rose was sitting at the tea-table with her work-basket beside her.

"Tea's ready, dear," she called, as the parlor-maid came out and placed the tea-tray and two letters on the table. "And the post," she added.

Martin came towards her.

"For me?"

"One." She handed him a letter, looking scared as she recognized the handwriting. It was Dorothy's.

The other letter, addressed to herself, was also from Dorothy.

They opened their envelopes simultaneously. After reading a line or two Martin sat down with an exclamation. His letter ran as follows:

“234 Wilton Place, S.W.

“DEAR FATHER,

“I enclose my marriage certificate. We got married from Aunt Polly’s. I am sorry, but you were quite definite about having nothing to do with it. Although I don’t suppose it will interest you in the slightest, I must of course let you know what I’ve done. We are staying with Claud’s people until we can find a suitable flat. You can find out all about the family I’ve married into in Debrett, if you have one in the house. I think it is awfully good of them not to treat me as if I were a housemaid!

“DOROTHY BASTAPLE.”

He sat gazing into space. His emotions were very mixed. One was of parental authority scorned. He disliked the indifference of the wording and the curt tone. The reference to Debrett galled him. It implied some sort of preëminence on Dorothy’s part; inferiority on his. Who then were these Bastaples? Their address sounded important. Before he came to any conclusion about them, perhaps he had better look them up. Apparently Dorothy did not know he possessed a copy of Debrett. He had invested in one when he was knighted.

He looked up at Rose. She was engrossed in her letter, a much longer one than his own.

“Look at this. I shall be back in a few minutes,” he said, handing it to her, and went indoors.

In his study it took him more than five minutes to discover who the Bastaples were. Cross-references at

last informed him that it was the family name of the fifth Baron Chaswayt of Sheen, and that the obnoxious Claud was the son of the Hon. Algernon Bastaple, heir presumptive to the Barony. And Martin had spoken alightingly of him as a "grocer's young man!" Dorothy was sure to have repeated that. It made his blood tingle. What ought he to do about it? Apologize? Deny it? It was most awkward. And his own daughter two lives off a Barony! With a coat of arms and a pedigree! Only once removed from the distinction of an Honorable! He spoke the appellation aloud—"The Honorable Mrs. Bastaple." Then, "Lady Bastaple." Lady Leffley sounded meaningless in comparison. His inclination was to go and breathe the aristocratic air of Wilton Place, to call on the Hon. Algernon, to make the acquaintance of the Hon. Mrs. Bastaple, to address the youngest Bastaple familiarly as Claud, to climb down to Dorothy. But his nerve was not equal to doing any of these things, except the last, and that only by letter. An inner conviction satisfied him that if he did he would be laying himself open to a certain snub. In imagination he felt the discomfort of the future Baron's eye fixed upon him. No, his best policy would be a retiring one. It was safer, more discreet. Perhaps in time . . .

He returned to the veranda, walking with a sprightly step. Rose's letter, four closely written pages of loving explanation, was tucked away in the bosom of her dress. She did not want Martin to see it, and he did not ask to do so. She was afraid that no explanation would render him less obdurate, less angry with Dorothy for marrying clandestinely and without his consent. She was accordingly surprised to see how calm, almost serene, his face looked.

"Martin, you won't—you're not going to be angry with the dear girl," she ventured timidly. "Think, we were young once ourselves, dear. We didn't care to wait——"

"I'm not angry," he said.

"But I thought you told her——"

"Dorothy led me to think she contemplated making an ill-assorted match. She made some intemperate reference to marrying a—quite common young man. A grocer's assistant, in fact. Of course it annoyed me. Now that I know she has done nothing to be ashamed of, I naturally bear her no ill-will. Although she has not made exactly a brilliant match, it is at any rate satisfactory from the social standpoint." Martin cleared his throat. "The Bastaples are distinguished, if a little impoverished. If my memory serves me, the head of the family is Lord Chaswayt, and Claud's father the next of kin. That of course means that Claud is presumptive heir to the Barony."

He purposely avoided looking at Rose, but he knew, without the exclamation that broke from her, that she appreciated Dorothy's new standing. Long as Dorothy's letter to her mother was, it contained nothing more illuminating about the Bastaples than she had vouchsafed to her father.

"You mean," stammered Rose, "that one day Dorothy will be—a baroness!"

Martin nodded. His face had the preoccupied look of one who is making a mental calculation.

"It is possible we may live to see it," he said, and sighed a little. "But it may be years—many years. In the meantime we must think about a wedding pres-

ent. Something in plate. We could have their crest put on." He glanced at the heavy gold ring on his little finger, a present from Rose. "And I might as well have my ring engraved with ours at the same time."

XXXIX

AUNT POLLY GOES HOME

A FEW days after Dorothy's marriage Edgar, on returning home late one afternoon, noticed an unwonted quietness about the little house. Nowhere on the ground floor was there any sign of Aunt Polly. Edgar's hands were dirtier than usual. There were grease-marks on his clothes, the filtration of oil that had come through his overalls. But his face was alight with pleasurable emotion. He was looking for Aunt Polly to impart it. While he stood in the passage listening for sounds of her the small servant came down the stairs on tiptoe. Her face was full of alarm.

"I've set your tea in the back room, Mr. Edgar," she whispered. "Don't make no noise. Mistress is took dreadful bad. I think she's asleep now; but all down one side she's as cold as death, and stiff-like. She wouldn't let me fetch the doctor."

Without waiting to hear more Edgar ran noiselessly upstairs. Carefully he opened his aunt's door. She was not asleep. Her little black eyes opened and fastened on him. The sardonic lips parted in an affectionate smile.

"I'll lay you come up without your tea," she said feebly. "You needn't look so scared. I ain't in pain. It's p'ralysis, that's all. I don't need a doctor to tell me that. I just crumpled up while I was countin'

your collars for the wash. Thank the Lord, He didn't put the stillness in me tongue. I can't move, but I can talk. I shall die talkin'," she chuckled.

"Aunt P., can't I do anything?"

"Nothin' whatsoever. Don't look like a funeral. Dyin's only a sort of change. I shan't be sorry to go. I believe it'll rest me like. Fancy meetin' Peacock again!" The thought seemed to tickle her. "I s'pose Martin would say he was burnin' in Hell, but that's not my idea. Peacock liked his drop, but that don't make him a sinner. I reckon he's in a sort of heavenly 'Feathers' where you don't have to pay for drinks. Now you run along and have your tea. You can come up afterwards, and by and by you can fetch Rose."

Her animated manner, so unlike anything Edgar had associated with a death-bed, gave him the impression that she could not be so very ill, after all. Presently he would persuade her to see the doctor; but in the meantime, to humor her, he would have his tea. He went downstairs and brought it up on a tray to eat, sitting on her bed.

"I can see you're burstin' to tell me something, Ed. What is it?" she asked.

"I've got my C. Av.—my flying certificate," he said with suppressed elation.

"What, to-day?"

He nodded. "Went through all the tests without any trouble. I thought you'd like to know. They said I shaped well. There were some officers on the ground from the War Office. They took my name."

"What's that mean?" she asked guardedly.

"I hope it means they think I'm good enough for the R.F.C."

"The Army?"

"Royal Flying Corps. The pay's jolly good. And if there's war——"

"I shan't live to see it. It's no good tellin' you to take care of yourself, I s'pose. Well, it's comforting to know you've got it. It's a good sign. Now you go on with your tea."

Edgar did so. There was a short silence.

"Think you can do without me, Ed?" she asked suddenly. "The flyin' certificate's something. I've left you enough to keep goin' on without your havin' to depend on Martin."

The boy swallowed uncomfortably. "Don't talk like that, Aunt P.," he said gruffly. "I can't bear the idea of your—not being here. You're such a trump."

"Well; I ain't done any real harm in me life, only lashed out with me tongue at times. . . . Wonder if you could get hold of Dolly when you go to fetch Rose. I'd like to kiss her good-by."

"I'll get Dolly," he promised.

Over the old woman's face a change was creeping—the change she had referred to. Edgar began to notice it.

"Would you like me to fetch the others before it gets dark?" he asked with concern.

"It's gettin' dark now, ain't it? I can't see as well as I did when you first came in. Yes, better fetch 'em."

"I'll send Matilda to sit with you while I'm gone."

"No, don't do that. I'm not afraid of bein' alone. There's a murmurin' in me ears I like listenin' to. Reminds me of the sea. Give me them beads over there."

At the base of a sixpenny plaster cast of the Virgin

on the mantelpiece lay a rosary. Edgar placed it in the twitching brown fingers.

"I'll hurry," he said. He saw the need for it.

He could not find Dorothy. She was out of London for the day with her husband. But Rose and Martin were in. Rose was shocked at his news.

"Shall I be in time?" she asked, getting up at once.

Martin had got up too. "We'll try," he said. "We'll have a taxi, of course."

Edgar looked hesitatingly at his father. Aunt Polly had said nothing about him.

"She—only asked for mother and Dolly," he stammered.

"I daresay she thought I might not like to come after the bitterness she has expressed towards me. I am not so unforgiving as that. Come, Rose."

Within twenty minutes or so the trio entered the old woman's bed-chamber. It was only seven o'clock and broad daylight, but gray twilight engulfed Aunt Polly. Although she could hear their footsteps, her eyes only discerned nebulous shapes.

"Rose!" she called. "That you, my dear? I want your hand. No, don't take that one. It's dead already . . . the other. That's right. Dolly couldn't come? That's a pity. Edgar, come and stand close, dearie." Her failing eyesight made an effort to pierce the gloom. "There's something in the room I don't like," she suddenly whimpered. "Has a cat got in? I hate cats. Always make me creep—cats. Drive it out, Edgar. . . . Isn't there a cat? What is it?"

Martin looked uncomfortable.

"There's no cat in the room, Aunt Mary," he said uneasily, approaching the bed.

"Then—it's you, Martin!" Her voice shook. "No wonder I felt something queer. . . . I didn't ask you to come. Want to see the last o' me? Come to gloat!"

Martin cleared his throat. Even in death Aunt Polly was proving embarrassing.

"Dear Aunt Mary, I came because I thought you might need me——"

"Need you? When have I ever needed you, Martin? You've never done anything but hate me."

"Indeed, no. I've never hated you," he protested.

"Oh, it don't matter, anyway. I've lasted my time just the same even if you have. You can stop, now you've come. It's all the same to me."

She lay with closed eyes, muttering to herself.

Rose bent over her.

"Aunt Polly, dear, we've come to sit with you, but you must lie quiet. You'll make yourself excited if you talk too much."

Martin took a small book out of his pocket. It was a Methodist volume of occasional prayer. He turned the leaves until he came to the page headed, "For those about to die," and then diffidently suggested that he should "read something."

Aunt Polly's eyes blinked threateningly.

"No cant," she snapped. "I never could abide it. Give me the prayers of a good woman, if I've got to have prayers at all. Say something, Rose."

Rose slipped to her knees. Her voice, devout and tremulous, rose in prayer, a simply worded supplication, heartfelt, not book-learned. It showed that Rose was very used to talking to her God. She had never needed to say, "Lord, teach us how to pray aright." To pray had always come natural to her. To her, God was

everywhere, accessible, loving. He was in the room now in the guise of the Angel of Death. She asked Him to be very kind, to show His face mercifully.

"Thanks," said the old woman. "I'm comfortable now." She lay with closed eyes, holding Rose's hand. Edgar knelt at the other side of the bed. The room was very still. "You'll find I ain't forgotten you, Rose," she murmured. "You and the children—God bless you. You'd best kiss me now. I want to go to sleep."

Rose kissed her. Edgar kissed her. Martin moved forward.

"No, not you."

He shrank back, mortified by the aversion she showed for him.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Aunt Mary?" he appealed.

There was no answer. He could not even tell whether she had heard his question. But just at the last she opened her eyes.

"You'll be afraid to die, Martin Leffley," she croaked, "unless——"

She went to her last account with the sentence unfinished.

XL

PURELY COMMERCIAL

A BOARD meeting of "Liversidge, Limited," had just come to an end. Of the five directors who had been present, Liversidge and Martin alone remained sitting at the large mahogany table. Martin gloomily picked up the check for two guineas (his directorial honorarium) which lay before him on the blotting-pad, and folding it carefully placed it in his pocketbook. A curious smile flickered over Liversidge's lips as he watched the action.

"Don't look so downhearted, Leffley," he said. "Think of me. I'm going to be hit to the tune of thousands a year."

"You can afford it. I can't," Martin retorted. "A ten per cent. dividend instead of the usual thirty means a big loss to me. I've been counting on three hundred a year from my investment in the business. Now, because of this wretched war, I don't even know that I'm going to get ten per cent. for long."

"No, I wouldn't count on it. A large number of drugs will soon be unobtainable, or they'll be three times their present price with the German market closed. Still, I suppose we oughtn't to grumble. Thirty per cent. all these years from cheap imports! You should have done what I have—put all your savings into American investments."

"Savings!" Martin's tone was indignant. "What have I had to save? After taking the cream off the business, you make yourself secure by floating it as a limited concern at an inflated price. Even now you'll get a rich man's income out of your holding."

"You're talking as if it were a crime to be well off. That wasn't your tone once. I don't see that you've much to complain of, or any reason for falling foul of me. If it hadn't been for me you probably wouldn't be in Parliament, and certainly not knighted." Liversidge selected a cigar from his case and lit it. "What's the matter with you, Leffley? You can't be hard up. There are the sales of that drink of yours and your parliamentary salary."

"The drink's not selling anything to speak of. It hasn't for months. As for my parliamentary salary, how long is that likely to last?" Martin asked pointedly. "You ought to know, Liversidge."

"You mean that the Hemford people are talking of supporting some one else at the next election," was the easy reply. "Yes, I know. Gammel told me. Well, why don't you look out for another constituency?"

Martin was going to say something—something nasty, but thought better of it. He got up from his chair and vented his ill-humor in another direction.

"This accursed war!" he raged. "We ought to have kept out of it. What is Serbia to us, or Belgium, either? God knows what it will cost the country."

"Unless I'm mistaken, it will keep you in Parliament another couple of years," Liversidge observed, through a cloud of cigar-smoke. "There'll be no general election till it's over. Don't worry, Leffley. With your abilities you'll not come to grief. And the drug trade

will be all right again directly we have peace. We can't compete with Germany in chemicals. We shan't try. There'll be a lot of talk about capturing the German market, but it won't go beyond talk. Our lot have taken care to queer production here. Good thing too, if you ask me. We don't want our working classes controlling all the sources of supply. It would only mean higher wages. That's why I'm a Freetrader and always shall be."

Liversidge was in a ruminative mood. He could speak his mind before Martin. For years they had pulled in the same boat, Martin wielding a strenuous oar, Liversidge using his brains and conserving his strength. Although they were not now directly associated, Martin had gone too deeply into the conspiracy against labor, had been pledged too thoroughly to the cause of pacifism to be able to expose his mentor. Besides, as Liversidge knew, he was done. His public career was ended. He was a negligible quantity.

"This war was inevitable," he proceeded. "The only thing to do was to make the utmost out of the cheap German market before it was closed. I never thought we should have so much time. Think of it, twenty years to prepare for a rainy day! Twenty years of gorgeous profits out of the silly public! It was so easy to gull them into a sense of security by offering them a free breakfast-table, cheap drugs, low prices and all the rest of it. I shudder when I think of the millions our lot—the big importers—have made that might have been spent on the Army and Navy. Of course we preached peace at any price. Did they expect us to chuck away good money while it was coming in in sackfuls? They talked about national insurance by means of a big army—

they, the professional and upper classes; the people who haven't the gumption to make money quickly! Well, we insured in a different way. We're all right. We've scooped in the big profits and invested them out of the country, where they're safe. And if the worst comes to the worst I shall be off to America for safety too. It's each one for himself in this world!"

Martin could only envy the position of Liversidge and his like. Personally, the war did not concern him any more than it did them. But he was going to be hit by it, and they, relatively, were not. With all the will in the world he had never been able to make money quickly. He was in the same case as those for whom Liversidge expressed such contempt. He knew it would be no use looking for sympathy from the successful druggist; but he wanted to get out of him the truth about his position in Hemford. He could but hear the worst.

"Shall I be able to count on Gammel's and your support at the next general election?" he asked.

Liversidge laughed softly. "We've done with politics, my dear fellow. They've served our purpose. No, I don't think you'd be wise to count on us. After this war, too, when the truth's out, it's my opinion most of the electors will want to sack their candidates and ask for their money back."

XLI

"SPREAD WINGS"

MARTIN left the Board-room in a chastened spirit. He had long known that the Gammel party had used him as a tool, but he resented being told so to his face, as Liversidge had practically done. It had been a trying morning for him. To be informed that his income from the drug stores would in future be reduced by two-thirds was heart-breaking enough, but to know that at the termination of the war his political career would certainly come to an end and his parliamentary salary cease, left his future looking terribly black. All the way home blank despondency took possession of him.

He found Rose poring over an official-looking letter. Her face bore traces of tears.

"What is it?" he asked.

"About poor Aunt Polly's will," she answered, and handed him the document.

A glance at the heading showed him that it came from the office of the Public Trustee. He subsided on a chair and read the typewritten page at speed. His own name was not mentioned in it; but it stated that Mrs. Peacock had bequeathed an annuity of two hundred a year to Lady Leffley with reversion to her children, to whom £500 each had also been left.

The news struck more than one chord of emotion in Martin's breast. He was cheered, surprised, disap-

pointed. He had often tried to estimate Aunt Polly's means, but never in his most sanguine moments had he imagined her to be worth so much as this. The value of her estate must be nearly six thousand pounds! Vain regrets assailed him. If he had only known! He was her nearest relative. The whole of her money might have come to him! And because he had not known, because he had never guessed, that she could have so much to leave, he had let his dislike of her spoil his chances of being her heir. . . . A hundred or two had been the most he had credited her with possessing. And here alone were legacies of £500 each to Edgar and Dorothy! It was exasperating to think of such misplaced generosity. And to Rose merely the interest of a capital sum, and for life only! True, the amount was beyond his expectations, but the way it was left clearly showed that the old woman's purpose was to hamper him and to prevent him ultimately benefiting by her death.

So engrossed was he with these unpleasant reflections that Rose had to speak twice before she could secure his attention.

"What did you say?" he asked absently.

"I was saying that I did think she might have left something to you, Martin. But probably she thought a legacy to me was the same thing."

"Yes—probably."

"And so well off as she was! Who ever would have thought it! I hope it isn't wicked, but I can't help being glad for the dear children's sakes. And for ours too, considering you've been so worried about money lately. Poor dear old Aunt Polly! I know she was crotchety sometimes. Once or twice we nearly quarreled because of the way she ran you down. I don't

think she really meant it. She was so good-hearted. Look how kind she always was to the children. And now to leave so much! Oh, Martin, we ought to be thankful! And just when you want it, too. Hadn't I better make a will at once in your favor? Or would it come to you anyhow?"

Martin was staring at the carpet. At the last words he looked up, and with something like a snap in his voice said:

"Don't you know what an annuity is? Money left for your lifetime only. You *can't* leave it to me. After your death it goes to Dorothy and Edgar. She meant to leave me out and she has, that's all."

A look of alarm came into Rose's face.

"But—Martin—supposing I died—sooner than most?"

"I wish you wouldn't harp so much on death," he said irritably. "You've been quite morbid on the subject lately. Why shouldn't you last as long as other people? You ought to outlive me. Women make older bones than men, as a rule. *Their* lives are exempt from stress and strain."

"Perhaps I ought to tell you—especially now. I'm not well. There's something the matter with me. I saw a specialist some weeks ago. It—it might be a very little while, dear."

Martin looked incredulous, then frightened. Rose ill! Rose, who had never complained of an ache or a pain, whom he had kept at her daily round of social duties without inquiry as to whether she felt fatigued or not because he regarded her as "strong as a horse." Rose, with her high color and plump figure—ill! For a mo-

ment sheer fear of losing her drove all thoughts of the legacy out of his head.

"You'd better tell me all—there is to tell," he quaked.

"I will, dear."

She was glad to unburden her mind of the fateful secret; sharing it with Martin seemed to rob it of half its poignancy. She made her confession with all the repression of feeling of which she was capable, but it did not deceive him.

"I shouldn't have worried you about it at all," she said, "only—if things are going to be bad and you're not sure of being returned to Parliament you oughtn't perhaps to count on—on——"

He nodded.

"And I must try and live as long as I can. . . . The specialist said if I could be in the country I might prolong my life—a good many years. But it wasn't to be thought of then. Now if you think——"

He reached for her hand. He put his arms round her. It was the uncontrollable impulse of a man grasping at something he feared to lose, something overwhelmingly necessary to him. Never before had he fully realized how much she meant to him. Her disclosure gave him much the same sense of shock as a man must experience when he is told he must be prepared to lose a limb.

"My God," he groaned. "Rose—don't you know I can't do without you?"

Her head sought his shoulder. Tears filled her eyes.

"Heaven wouldn't be heaven for me," she whispered brokenly, "until you got there."

There was a long silence. It was a new sensation for Martin to have to struggle for composure. Until now he had never actually experienced what it was to have "a

lump in one's throat." He found himself swallowing painfully.

"About going into the country to live," he said at last. "As soon as possible, don't you think? Somewhere within reasonable distance of town, so that I could occasionally get up to the House while I still represent Hemford. After that . . . retirement, I suppose." There was a note of fretfulness in his voice. To him retirement was equivalent to a confession of failure. Later on perhaps, when he had got used to it, it might not be so galling. . . .

Rose spoke.

"I know of a cottage. It's in Kent. I saw an advertisement, Martin, and I—I answered it. Everything about it sounded so tempting. I went down to see it one afternoon. I never thought there might be a possibility of our taking it. It was a feeling that I must see it—a craving like some people get for the sea. Shall I tell you about it?" A note of yearning came into her voice. "It's three miles from a station."

It was as well she could not see the discouraged look in his face.

"But there's a cab in the village; and a post-office where they sell home-cured bacon and groceries, and the proprietor kills meat twice a week. And there are farms for milk and butter, and two bakers."

He nodded grudging approval.

"But the cottage! It stands back from the road on a small terraced lawn. It's long and low and has a thatched roof and latticed windows; two sitting-rooms, three bedrooms, and such immense cupboards, Martin! You'd love the staircase—all old oak. There's an orchard too, and a pond with water-lilies, and shady

trees. The house is called 'Spread Wings.' The landlord would put in a bathroom and a new sink. And the chimneys don't smoke."

"How much is it?"

"Only twenty-four pounds a year, and hardly any rates! I've got a photograph of it."

She went to her desk, found it and stood eagerly watching his face as he looked at it. He was agreeably surprised. The picture was inviting. It showed a picturesque, half-timbered house with a date above its porch. A little place, but just such a place as he well knew hundreds of people were seeking and few house-agents have on their books. "Spread Wings!" A nice-sounding name too. It suggested a country house more than a cottage.

"Not bad at all; unpretentious," he commented. "If everything is as you say I think we ought to snap it up. An odd name for a house."

"Yes, isn't it quaint? The owner explained it to me. There is a broken bit of tombstone let into one of the walls, and on it you can just read the words. It was part of a verse about 'love sitting there with spread wings.' I like it, don't you? Oh, Martin, to live there, to end our days in the deep, deep quiet—so tranquil! Only country people to talk to and take an interest in. A little church to go to—ever so old. Everything—simple."

Martin sighed. Simplicity, stagnation, retirement. All these spelt the same to him. Retirement. . . . A cottage and Rose's annuity. Twenty long years behind him of profitless scheming and wasted work. Rose had worked too, as hard as he had, but she did not feel the bitterness of failure because she was so unworldly.

Belated consideration for her moved him. He looked closely at her. No trace of her fatal malady showed in her face. It reflected no physical suffering. It was only illuminated by the spirit within her—sincere, indomitable, devoted. He felt a queer pricking at his heart as he gazed at her.

“Dear soul!” he murmured. “I do need you.”

“Oh, Martin! Do you? I—I don’t want to leave you. . . . And then there’s the annuity. We—we must enjoy that together as long as possible. When I’m gone and it stops, what will you do?”

Martin had thought of that too. For more reasons than one he needed Rose.

“You must take care of yourself, my dear,” he exhorted her. “Think of yourself first—for my sake.”

XLII

THE WOMAN PAYS

THE evening was drawing in. Deep wheel-ruts in the gravel marked the passage of pantechnicons from the front door of "Tivoli." The removal men had done their worst. Wheels had cut into the bordering sweep of grass verge. Straw and scraps of paper littered the drive. Denuded of curtains and blinds, the windows had a forbidding look.

Within, all the rooms were dismantled. Two negligible kitchen chairs only remained in the library and on these Rose and Martin were resting themselves. All their other belongings were on the way to Kent. The servants had left. To-morrow "Tivoli" would be tenantless. Among the laurels, facing the road, a board announced that already.

Martin had purposely busied himself all day with the object of trying to forget his worries in physical exertion. Rose, too, had done her share of packing, but he had spared her as much strenuous work as he could. She had gone out for a little in the afternoon. She was telling him about it now.

"I went to see Ada. I wanted to tell her we were going away, but that we would look after her just the same."

"Yes?" said Martin uncomfortably. "How was she?"

"She wasn't in. The woman where she lodges seemed

anxious about her. She went out early this morning and said nothing about not being back. She says she has been in a very low state lately, eating hardly anything and crying a lot. I wish we could get her into the country. Perhaps I may be able to arrange it. She's country-bred. I'm so sorry for her. Aren't you, Martin?"

Martin's head was averted. He nodded without turning it. Only once before had he referred to the painful subject of Ada, but his mind recurred to it often enough. He could not deny his culpability. His sense of responsibility for the undoing of a human soul had increased rather than diminished. At times he had employed sophistry to deaden his qualms, hoping always that the cloud might lift, the girl marry and forget the past in which he had had a part.

"I'll write to her as soon as we're settled," said Rose. "There's the paper-boy coming down the street, Martin. Wouldn't you like one? Call him, dear."

He opened the window, hailed the tattered human screech-owl and bought a halfpenny paper. He scanned the headlines for war news. Very little else interested him just now.

"There's nothing fresh," he said, passing it to her. He took out a letter from his pocket and placed it on her lap. "Oh, by the way, I found this on the doormat this morning and forgot to give it to you."

"It's the baker's bill, I expect. I told him to send it in." Rose was looking at the paper, letting the letter lie in her lap. An exclamation of dismay broke from her.

"What is it? Some one we know in the casualty list?" he asked.

"No, . . . Martin!" Her voice was horror-stricken. "Listen! 'The body of a young woman was found in the Regent's Canal this afternoon and awaits identification. Certain articles of her clothing are marked A.M. Deceased also wore a silver brooch lettered "Ada." No other clues to her identity have been discovered. The body had not been many hours in the water.' " She paused. She had grown very pale. So had Martin. "And we were just talking of Ada!" she said in awed tones. "Do you think—could she have—Martin, speak! *Say* what you think!"

"What's in that letter?" Martin's voice grated. "Hadn't you better open it? It may not be—from the baker." He reached a shaking hand for it. "Let me read it, Rose. If it were anything—unpleasant—you might be shocked. You're not well, remember."

"Look at it first, then."

He opened the envelope and took from it a sheet of cheap notepaper. The writing was unfamiliar, uneducated. Something prompted him to look at the signature. After seeing it, to read it under the direct gaze of Rose's troubled eyes was a positive agony.

"MY LADY,

"When you get this I expect they will have found me. I mean to slip it through the letter box first. I have tried hard to keep on and think more brightly of the future, but no use. I could not bear the child when it comes because of the father and *it would be no good*. If I wait till it comes then I would have to live if only to keep it, so better dead while there is only me.

"Oh, how true is the Bible. It is always in my head. The wages of sin is death. Be sure your sin will find you out. First one and then the other. I get no rest. One of them is on the

wall of my room opposite the bed so as I can see it night and morning.

"What made me such a silly, weak girl. It was all so happy and innocent not long ago when I could work and sing at my work, my lady.

"I cannot thank you properly, dearest mistress, for your lovely kindness. There is no one like you. Not one bit did I deserve it. But I do love you, and I pray you may never know all I know, because you are so real good.

"Oh, mistress, I am afraid to die, but it is worse to live like this. If only it was all over now, but I must write to mother first.

"Your affec. and respectful servant,

"ADA."

Remorse gnawed at Martin's very vitals—remorse and fear. He had not only ruined a girl's happiness, but he had been the means of sending her to her death. His whole being sickened and shuddered. He passed through terrible moments of self-accusation. He was brought face to face with the evil within himself, the evil that had wrought this tragedy.

Rose held out her hand for the letter.

"I think I had better see it, dear," she said. "I am prepared for it to be about—what we have read in the paper. I can see by your face that——"

"No, no, you can't! You mustn't go by my face!"

It was almost a challenge, wrung from him against his will. His voice was harsh with alarm lest she should have read too much in his face. But it was not in Rose to attribute any evil to him.

"Darling, I meant that I can see you are dreadfully upset and sorry. No one could help liking the girl—I was very fond of her myself."

Martin rose. The letter made him abject, hesitant.

"I—I'll burn it after you've seen it," he stammered. "We—we don't want it made public at the inquest. There's sure to be one."

After reading it Rose handed it back. She was too moved for speech.

In silence Martin placed it in the grate and set a match to it. The thin paper flared and subsided like a dead thing. Then he put out a trembling forefinger and dissipated the charred remnants into dust.

XLIII

EVENSONG

WHITE plaster, gray oak, purple tiles, were the prevailing features of "Spread Wings." In the brick foundation near the entrance a square foot of gray stone bore the name in worn lettering. Most of the windows had latticed casements; the eaves were low. The plaster over the porch was impressed with the date 1714. Although the absence of wings belied the name of the house, it was in other respects everything that Rose had described it.

At the bottom of the two small terraces which divided it from the road—horizontal strips of green turf and flower-beds, divided by a brick path—Martin stood with his back to the white paling admiring the general aspect of his new home. It was as unlike "Tivoli" as he was to his old self. His black morning coat was replaced by a tweed suit. He wore a straw hat and brown shoes. A week of the country had made an inward if a slower change in him as well. He was less fretful, less discontented.

Town born and bred, Martin had always associated the country with stagnation. It surprised him therefore to find that the days which he had expected to drag passed instead with astonishing swiftness. He found himself taking an interest in rural matters. He had arrived in time to see the carrying of the harvest, the

one season of the year when country folk show to the greatest advantage. Their cheery voices, their energetic labors their quiet pride in a bounteous result, were pleasant things to hear and watch. Village life, the sweet field smells, even the thunderous transit of agricultural machinery past his door, provided him with new and agreeable sensations.

More than anything else the social habits of the countryside impressed him. In London it had been the exception for him to know his neighbors; here they showed a ready friendliness which contrasted favorably with the hostile attitude of the suburban class from which he had just emerged. These people were free from suspicion, devoid of patronage or speculations as to a man's worldly position. They were just humanly pleasant. Life to them was not one constant pursuit of things unattainable. They might be unambitious, but it was not because they were devoid of intellectual gifts. On the contrary, although they took no active share in public affairs they were deeply interested in them. They had absorbing interests of their own.

The discovery reacted on his mentality. In this new environment his own boundless discontent had nothing to feed on. It began to weaken. His unrealized ambitions no longer ate into his soul. At times he found himself almost looking forward to the day when his political career would end. After all, the position to which he had attained made him welcome among the males of his new circle. They cared nothing for his title—he saw that—but his parliamentary knowledge was respected. Rose too had made friends among both men and women without effort. They took her at her face value.

She was so happy. Her constant expression of it gave Martin pleasurable emotions. She felt well, sometimes quite well. She was seldom depressed, even in spite of Edgar's absence in France. He had got his "wings" and was serving in the Flying Corps. So many mothers' sons were in France. It was the common lot. Every woman showed a brave heart these days. And there had been reconciliation with his father before he left. They had seen him off at Victoria, and Rose had been so proud of him in uniform. He had looked so brave and handsome. Some one had told her that he ran much less risk in the Air Service than he would have done in the trenches. She believed it, and only wiped away a furtive tear when the train had taken him from her. Dorothy's husband had gone too. Dorothy was coming to stay at "Spread Wings." Martin as well as Rose was looking forward to seeing her.

He stood leaning on the gate pensively reviewing these matters. The sun was sinking. From half a mile away came the mellow note of a church bell. Rose came out and joined him.

"Isn't it a perfect evening?" she said, slipping her arm through his. "There's going to be a gorgeous sunset."

He picked a spray of rambler roses that grew over the arch of the gate and gave it to her. She fastened it in her dress with as much delight as a young girl shows at a similar attention from her lover. He looked at the prayer-book in her hand questioningly.

"I'm going to evensong," she told him. "There will be special prayers and hymns every night now for the war. The rector has put our boy's name on the list of

those fighting. It's nailed on the church door. You'll see it on Sunday."

"I'll walk with you," he said.

He had only been to church twice before. A little to Rose's surprise he had shown no disposition to attend the village chapel. He had not mentioned it, but it struck him that to associate himself with those who supported it—the lesser lights of the village community—would be discourteous to his equals, or those who had accepted him as such. Besides, the rector had called on them and shown himself to be a most amiable person, without, so far as Martin could gather, any ritualistic leanings. He chose "church" out of policy now, the harmless policy of the man who does not want to be different from his associates.

Curiously enough, the placid service of the little church afforded him a sense of comfort. Here no fiery pastor stamped and stormed over the punishment of sin, the fierceness of God's wrath, and the perils of hell-fire. Here was a gentler creed which laid more stress upon forgiveness and the infinite mercy of a Power superior to eternal punishment.

On the first of these occasions Rose and he had stopped for communion, though not to participate in it. Martin had followed it word for word:—

Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life . . .

Almighty God . . . Judge of all men . . . We do earnestly repent. We are heartily sorry for our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable. . . . Have mercy upon us!

Were others similarly weighed down with the burden of guilt? Were these words for them as for him? Or were his sins—his greatest sin—of a hue too black for any cleansing? Aunt Polly had said he would be afraid to die *unless*— What had she meant by “unless”? How had she meant to fill in the hiatus? And if he repented, as he did; and if there was forgiveness, how was he to earn it? By confession? Confession to Rose?

For days he turned it over in his mind, and was often on the very brink of it. There were so many opportunities; quiet evenings, gentle walks through darkening perfumed lanes, her arm in his. Would she forgive? He knew she would. But would her dear human clemency reflect the Divine? He thought it would. There was a lot of the divine in Rose.

One evening when they were walking in the garden together he braced himself for confession.

“Rose,” he began, “what would you think if some one told you that I was a man utterly different to what you have thought me all these years—a bad man?”

“I shouldn’t believe it,” she answered promptly. “I have lived with you and I know that’s impossible.”

“But supposing I told you so myself, gave you facts to prove it?”

“I think it would break my heart,” was all she said, and so for ever stayed confession. Divine compassion she might have, but while she remained his Rose in the flesh, he would not call upon the divinity in her to heal his hurts and in so doing wreck her happiness.

Her trust in him that he had betrayed. . . .

In these days he saw that this was the greatest sin of all, greater even in the Account against him than the betrayal of a little servant girl.

He was sorry with all his heart. As she stood by him now, a happy smile on her face, he realized with a stabbing pang of affection how much he loved her . . . immutably. In all the years they had lived together and slept side by side he had never cared for her like this. Now he hated her to suffer pain. He grieved to find her sometimes weeping quietly when she was thinking of Edgar. He loved her as men love early in life . . . now that it was too late . . . ever so late.

And he had betrayed her. He could never get away from the torment of that reproach. It was his daily scourge. He thought of it now as she looked up into his face, her own so absolutely free from guile.

"I'll walk with you," he said again. "Perhaps I'll come in too. It's not a long service."

He fell into step beside her.

"Dorothy comes to-morrow," she said contentedly.

"Yes, you'll like that." He hesitated. "I hope she won't remember our differences. I—I should like to start afresh with her. I want her to be happy."

"I'm sure she will be. Everything is so different down here. I even feel you're different, Martin. Dearer to me somehow, if such a thing could be."

"Nearer to you, perhaps," he said almost inaudibly.

A laborer passed them, touching his cap. Small children by the roadside dropped shy curtsies. A string of cattle, sauntering to their byres, turned trustful soft eyes on them. Here and there a cottage door stood open, revealing a lamp-lit interior; a late tea spread for the returning breadwinner; children being put to bed; old people tranquilly seated with folded hands; a girl peer-

ing out for her sweetheart . . . over all the scent of summer flowers not quite finished blooming, and the smoky fragrance of burning vegetation.

They turned into the side-road leading to the church, a little road girt with pine trees, needle-strewn. The bell stopped ringing as they reached the old lychgate. Rose looked at Martin questioningly. He followed her up the flagged path flanked on one side by the rectory garden, on the other by the trim and quiet churchyard, yew-set, sedulously tended. In the porch Rose stayed him by a touch on the arm. His eyes, following hers, went to the list of those fighting for their country for whom the prayers of the congregation were to be offered. "2nd Lieut. E. Leffley, R.F.C.," was among them.

Martin held his head up. Although he did not altogether recognize the honorable necessity for war, it seemed right that Edgar should have gone . . . proved him English. He would like to pray for the boy. He wondered if he dared.

The tiny congregation was already assembled. Rose, whose retiring nature always made her avoid prominence, led the way to a pew at the back of the church.

A quiet service, more solemn than is usual at evensong, because of the passionate supplications for peace; prayers for a nation's defenders, a nation's safety; women on their knees, a few of them weeping unobtrusively . . . women who could believe that though the God of battles sent men forth to be slain in their thousands, He would yet protect the individual, the loved one. Rose was of these.

Kneeling there, she softly sang the closing hymn, rendered all the more impressive by the devout attitude

of the congregation. The church was not well lit. Martin could not see the small print of his hymn-book distinctly, but Rose's voice supplied the want.

*Once more 'tis eventide, and we
Oppress'd with various ills draw near;
What if Thy Form we cannot see?
We know and feel that Thou art here.*

*Thy touch has still its ancient power:
No word from Thee can fruitless fall;
Hear, in this solemn evening hour,
And in Thy mercy heal us all.*

Amen!

Silence, rapt and brooding; prayers ascending as though borne upwards on wings.

"The peace of God which passeth understanding be amongst you and remain with you always."

Rose was lost in prayer. Her eyes were closed. Martin, waiting for the signal to rise, watched her through his fingers much as a wistful sinner might gaze through the barred gate of Heaven at a saint within. He knew she was praying earnestly and in simple words, as a child prays . . . for Edgar, for Dorothy, for him.

He had never prayed like that. As a child, no one had taught him; as a man, lip-service once a week had afforded him a sense of righteousness. Now the sources of communication between himself and his God seemed dried up—cut off.

He crouched awkwardly in his pew. His lips moved dumbly, attempting articulation. He could think of

no form of prayer, no suitable words in which to express the travail of his soul. He struggled for expression, and it came at last.

“Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!”

His knees, stiff and unused to bending, trembled beneath him. Then, as though a Hand forced them down, they sank to the hassock, and he buried his face in his arms.

